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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

Cop on the Prowl — THOMAS WALSH

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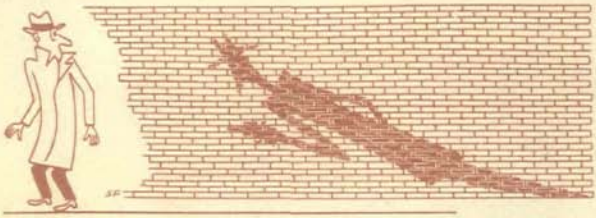

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a new story by

AUTHOR: **THOMAS WALSH**

TITLE: ***Cop on the Prowl***

TYPE: Human Interest Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Sergeant Alec Ferguson

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Alec Ferguson, a good cop, had raised his son Leo to know the difference between right and wrong. Now they were telling old Alec that his son was a murderer . . .*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

WHAT THEY HAD WHEN INspector Wallace Burnett got there about nine that evening were the facts in order and apparently quite clear from the very beginning. There had been only one shot, fired at 8:05 P.M. in the entrance hall of the James Parker Armstrong residence on Fifth Avenue in the lower Eighties; it had been heard and reported by only one man—a fussily dignified English butler from next door; and the body inside, immediately identified as Mr. Armstrong himself, had been shot once and obviously at close quarters, just over the right ear.

In addition—and this was the really vital information for Inspector Burnett—was the fact that two people had dashed out afterward and driven away in a new, two-tone sedan that had been waiting for them in front of the corner apartment house just opposite. The doorman at that building, by another extremely favorable circumstance, was able to identify one of those people as the Armstrong nursemaid. So there was no necessity at all, even that early in the case, for the usual methodical and painstaking preliminaries.

It developed before too long that there was little question as to the

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other person's identity. The Armstrong nursemaid, a young and attractive brunette named Gloria Morris, had been observed by the English butler conversing that very afternoon with the patrolman on the beat—a patrolman, as proved by a quick check with the neighborhood precinct, who reported for work every morning in a new, two-tone sedan, green and gray, with white sidewall tires—exactly as described by the apartment house doorman. The obvious inferences were that the nursemaid had admitted her patrolman gentleman-friend to the house on an evening when she was alone, that in some way they had managed to open the wall safe in the Armstrong bedroom upstairs, and that, at the last possible moment, Mr. Armstrong had been unfortunate enough to appear before them suddenly and unexpectedly in the front hall.

"So it's one of us, is it?" Inspector Burnett said, with no more than his customary harassed air of absent-minded, yet tough, driving efficiency. "Well, get on with it, why don't you? What's his name? What's his record?"

Pretty good, it appeared; three years in the department, with two commendations. And his name. . . There followed a brief pause during which Wallace Burnett glanced up from the Armstrong telephone with surprise and irritated resentment. "Leo Ferguson," the homicide man announced then, saying the name in a carefully inexpressive manner. "Alec Ferguson's boy, Inspector—Sergeant Ferguson."

Inspector Burnett, a dapper but chill-looking man who never showed any particular emotion in these matters, now twisted about in his chair with an abrupt but altogether instinctive movement. Another pause followed, but this time from Inspector Burnett's side. Then he nodded to himself, blinking his sarcastic blue eyes under burned-looking thin eyelashes.

"Good," he said bitterly. "Fine, and getting better and better. Old Alec Ferguson. I see. Well, what did you do about it?"

"I guess they're over there now," the homicide man told him stolidly. "Checking that end. Because—well, what else, Inspector? What else could we do?"

The homicide man's "there" was, of course, the other end of the case—Alec Ferguson's end, a modest and rather old-fashioned kitchen in a very modest section of Astoria, Long Island. Sergeant Ferguson himself—a stout, bull-necked man with heavy and unintelligent-looking features, a small potbelly, and big red-knuckled hands—had been informed shortly before of the Armstrong nursemaid, her companion, and the two-tone sedan; and now, sitting forward on one of the kitchen chairs, he had put his hands up to his head, to both

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sides of it, with the look of someone who had just become dazedly absorbed in his own thoughts—who understood that something had happened to him, and what it was, but for some reason couldn't manage to accept it. Somehow it did not seem to Sergeant Ferguson that he was thinking or reacting at all intelligently to the information he had just heard. Not Leo—that was what he kept telling himself. Not Leo! Were they out of their minds? But that was the kind of dumb and instinctive protest, even for Sergeant Ferguson, that carried no genuine force at a time like this. The shock had been too abrupt, too overwhelming. He was still groping along behind it—and not gaining any considerable ground, either.

Two homicide men were in the kitchen with him. They flanked young Tom Foley who had been located only ten minutes before in an Irish barroom over on Ditmars Avenue. One of the homicide men —Alec Ferguson's age and with pretty much Alec Ferguson's own background—was leaning against the sink, restlessly against the sink, eyeing Ferguson every so often but not speaking to him. The partner—much younger, with sharp, city-wide features, suspicious dark eyes, and a pugnaciously authoritative manner —was carrying on a low-pitched but persistent conversation with young Foley.

The evening paper and half a bottle of beer were on the table before Alec Ferguson, just as he had put them down a few minutes ago when he answered his doorbell. But Sergeant Ferguson was now asking himself: what had he said to them after that? And what had they said to him? He couldn't quite remember. The whole business was still slipping and twisting inside him, all confused; and yet, little by little, he felt it was acquiring the dreadful effect of insane sanity—like a dream in which the most impossible things occurred in an altogether quiet and orderly manner.

It was obvious that he must have answered a few of their questions, though not many. He must have informed them, at any rate, that Leo had gone out about six o'clock to meet Tom Foley in Monahan's for a glass of beer and a hot sandwich, afterward to go on to the night game at Yankee Stadium. And that was the truth, Alec Ferguson had begun insisting to himself slowly and effortfully—at least, and the qualification slipped out there before he could quite catch it, that was what Leo had told him. He rubbed his mouth now, to bring feeling into it and some sense into himself. Then he looked up. The younger homicide man was still driving at something, over and over; and Foley, at first looking and acting naturally bewildered, appeared now to have become frightened,

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yet stubborn under this questioning.

"But I told you!" he said. "Sure, I met him. But then somebody phoned him in Monahan's about six o'clock, maybe. You ask the bartender or any of the guys in there. They'll all tell you the same thing. They all saw it."

"That ain't what I asked," the homicide man said ominously. "We know all about that telephone call—they told us already. But who made it? You know who it was, Foley—you got to. You were right there."

Tom Foley, a slim, good-looking young truck driver from the neighborhood, wet his lips quickly, hesitated, then looked over at Alec Ferguson as if he needed some kind of assistance or advice from Leo's father.

"Maybe you know it," he said. "Not me. What girl are you talking about?" He set his jaw loyally. "Why, Leo Ferguson never went out with a girl in his whole life. Never!"

"Wait a minute," Alec Ferguson interrupted. He glanced from one to the other of them, his round face and heavy features giving him an expression of painful, still groping bewilderment. "Don't lie about anything, Tom. That's no good to us now—it never was and never will be. I know how you feel about this. But there's only one girl I know of—the one Leo's engaged to. Kitty Quinlan."

"This ain't no one named Kitty Quinlan," the homicide man put in abruptly. "So come on, Foley, quit stalling. You know who it was. You know that nursemaid he's been playing for the last couple of weeks, don't you?"

He made it a brutally coarse question, altogether unmistakable in what it implied—deliberately sarcastic and contemptuous as a slap in Alec Ferguson's face. Never a sensitive or high-handed man on ordinary occasions, and slow to anger, Alec was still old-fashioned enough to respond to such accusations with furious and instant vehemence. He did so now. His face congested. In his own home, Alec Ferguson thought blindly—and without the boy present to say so much as a word in his own defense! The Ferguson jaw set like granite and the tormented gray eyes began to flare darkly and savagely, though way back.

"Now get out!" he bellowed, jumping up and whirling on the other homicide man. "Both of you, get out! By God, Cleary, if you think you can march in here and act as if—" His fists clenched. "And I don't care if Wallace Burnett himself sent you over here. Get out now! Do you hear what I'm telling you?"

"Alec, Alec," the older homicide man said. He made a helpless gesture with one hand, looking acutely uncomfortable, opened his mouth again, closed it without

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speaking, then nodded to his partner. They went out into the hall and murmured there. Then the front door closed. Alec Ferguson sat down, put a hand over his eyes and shivered a little—not too noticeably, but all over.

He was aware that young Foley hurriedly took out a bottle of whiskey and two shot glasses from the corner cabinet.

"What is all this?" Foley whispered at him. "I didn't know what to tell them, Alec. What do they want Leo for? What happened?"

But that bewildering vacancy of thought and action had again compressed itself around Alec Ferguson. "I don't know," he said. "God help me! But there's a man been killed somewhere and they think—" He rolled his head desperately for a moment, attempting to clear it. "Do you know who called him at Monahan's tonight? Was it the girl they were talking about, Tom? Tell me!"

"That nursemaid?" young Foley whispered back. He glanced around at the street door. "I'm not sure, Alec—honest, I'm not sure! He just went into the phone booth at Monahan's and talked for a minute, maybe. Then he came out and said he had to meet somebody, and I hung around playing shuffleboard with a couple of the guys. I was still there when they came in and dragged me out like —what girl do they mean? Not that Gloria Morris dame?"

Gloria Morris, Alec Ferguson thought then. Gloria Morris. He remembered a voice on the phone last week when Leo had been out somewhere—a flip, impudent voice. "Oh, just Gloria," it had told him. "But I'll see him tomorrow. It's okay." See him tomorrow! So all along, Alec Ferguson thought numbly, even after Kitty Quinlan. . .

His thoughts darted around like that, quickly and rather foolishly, not completing themselves; then his first sensible idea came to him. Point One was that Leo knew the girl, and that it could be proved against him. What followed? That when they found her—and they would!—she'd accuse Leo; she'd say anything in this world to protect herself. He held the whiskey glass in his hand as if he had forgotten about it, then groped awkwardly, spilling half of it.

"Do you know her?" he demanded hoarsely. "Do you know where she lives, Tom?"

"I warned Leo," young Foley said, his lips tightening. "She used to call him at Monahan's, Alec—but she's no good! She and that sister of hers! They got a dumpy apartment over on Third avenue. But—" He hesitated again, looking down at Alec Ferguson with obvious uneasiness and concern. "Suppose you found Leo over there with her? You wouldn't blow the whistle, would you? You couldn't, Alec—not on Leo!"

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Alec Ferguson gaped at him almost stupidly. Blow the whistle? What did that mean? He had no idea; but again, as with the two homicide men, he felt he had to hit out now one way or another—to declare himself.

"Do you have to ask?" he demanded. His voice shook. "Whatever he did, I'm his father, Tom. And whatever happened tonight—it wasn't intended, I tell you. It couldn't have been!"

"I think they're crazy even to suspect Leo!" Foley said—but his eyes said something else. He wrung his hands. "If only I knew what to tell you. . . All right, say I know the address, Alec, and say you go over and find him there. What good would it do? They must be watching this house now. They're not that stupid."

Yes, Alec Ferguson thought, they must be watching us. Rousing himself with a hurried and rather ponderous physical effort, he edged a curtain aside in the front room and saw the police car and the two homicide men outside. The rear door, he counselled himself. A chance that way? He slipped back into the kitchen and whispered with Tom, getting the girl's address and telling young Foley what to do. Foley nodded, anxiously, then bracing himself started out into the front hall to distract the homicide men for as long as he could, without making them unduly suspicious.

It wasn't much of a stratagem, but it worked. Alec Ferguson plunged down into the back yard, waited and listened there, his heart pounding furiously. Then he edged ahead several steps and waited again, his face glistening with cold sweat under a floppy and rather yellowish-looking Panama hat. But the homicide men knew him, something inside whispered at Alec Ferguson—and of course they trusted him. He groaned softly. But what mattered against Leo's safety?

He refused to think about that part—he didn't dare. He crossed the alley, keeping well under the fence shadows; and three minutes later, half a dozen blocks away, Alec lurched breathlessly at the first taxicab in line at the Ditmars Avenue subway station.

Then, of course, began the really bad part of the whole business for someone like Alec Ferguson. There had been the initial shock, sudden and paralyzing, the flareup at the two homicide men, finally the hasty and furtive maneuvering with Tom Foley. Now, however, there was nothing to do but sit back in the dimness of the cab, grip his hands together, and ask himself if, tonight, Alec Ferguson's boy had shot down an unarmed and innocent man either in panic or blind fury.

And he had no idea how to answer that question. At this moment Leo Ferguson might have

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been a stranger to his own father. Leo as a small boy years ago, Leo in school, Leo grandly erect in his Army uniform—all that was one thing; but Leo as a reliable and trustworthy man, knowing his responsibilities, facing up to them, knowing right from wrong, as his father had always taught it to him—that seemed to be another thing at this moment, and much different.

Alec closed his eyes. If the truth must be told, why had he always been nervous and uneasy about the boy? Because he was the only one he had, Alec Ferguson had often told himself before. But was that really it? Perhaps you could bring a boy up without knowing him in any important way—because the important things people always kept well concealed inside themselves. even from those nearest and dearest to them. And to remember the girl now, and what Foley had told him, and the two-tone sports car . . .

A passing headlight picked Alec's face out of the shadow—the lips whispering silently, perhaps praying, although he was not conscious of it; the nostrils strained; the few drops of sweat over the heavily pouched eyelids. Was it Alec Ferguson who had ruined the boy?—who had been too easy with him years ago, after the mother had died, and later, when he had seen his mistake, perhaps much too hard? Why couldn't the two of them seem to understand each other? Was it only the difference in their generations, or was it something deeper, more significant—a difference in values and personal outlook? He had grumbled at Leo only last month about the new car and Leo had clapped him on the back cheerfully, and winked over him with a kind of derisive affection at Tom Foley. "Sure," Leo had said. "I know, Pop. I ought to be saving up for my old age, huh?" A car meant nothing, of course—just a foolish extravagance; but a cheap woman like this Gloria Morris, who could smile prettily at a man and give him soft words and put ideas into his head . . . No, Alec Ferguson thought desperately; he couldn't seem to believe in his own boy any more. Oh, God help him!

The cab stopped. Alec Ferguson got out, staring up at the house, then gesturing to the driver to wait right where he was. He went in, climbed two flights of stairs, and knocked at a door. "What?" a voice called out. "Leo Ferguson? No, he's not here. You must have the wrong apartment, mister. There's no—" Alec pushed inside.

The sister backed away from him. The other one, never seen but recognized at once and instinctively, had crouched back into the small bedroom and was standing there with both hands up to her face. She was terrified; even the sister was sick and white-looking.

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"Tell him!" the sister shouted, coming forward and catching Gloria by the shoulders. "I can't put up with any more of this. Tell him! He's the father, isn't he?"

Gloria began to weep hysterically, twice attempting to turn off into the wall and hide herself, and twice Alec Ferguson prevented her. Then the sister—thin, bitter, hard blue eyes—began to shake Gloria furiously.

"They thought it was so safe," she whispered at Alec Ferguson; "and so easy! She knew where the combination was written down. So she thought—and now something like this!"

She slapped the girl, then followed her into the bedroom, still slapping her. Gloria moaned.

"Was it Leo?" Alec Ferguson got out at last, feeling ice-cold inside, yet rock-steady. "*Was* it?"

"Oh, *no!*" the sister spat out, her thin face flashing venomously. "Not *your* boy! She did it alone, I suppose! He may be a cop—but he'll pay for this. I'll see that he does! He planned it; he talked her into it. And now he sent you over here, didn't he? Because he thinks—"

"Where is he?" Alec Ferguson interrupted quietly. "Where did he go?"

Then he heard about the gun. How Leo had put all the things into a canvas bag back there in the Armstrong apartment—the money and jewelry; how he had fought with Mr. Armstrong; how the loot had been scattered all over the front hall; how they had gathered it up afterward with desperate quickness. They had got back here before discovering that somehow Leo had left the gun in the Armstrong apartment—perhaps kicked it under something during all the excitement. When he realized he had forgotten the gun, Leo had run out like a crazy man. All he had said to them was that he had to get back the gun—before the police found it.

Once more it was necessary for Alec Ferguson to rouse himself by means of a deliberate physical effort. Yes, he thought, the gun. Very important. They didn't know yet that the girl had been seen and identified, so they thought the gun mattered. Perhaps it did. It was the last damning proof, obviously. And perhaps Alec Ferguson could get it for them. Or else he could. . . He could—what? But there was only heavy darkness on that side. He shrank from it.

Betray the boy?

He left blindly, clutching a pitiable and broken Gloria Morris by the right arm and pushing the sister away from them. Down in the cab he concentrated, trying to formulate a plan. He could bring the girl to Wallace Burnett—and tell them where they could find the gun, too. But against Leo?—against his own son?

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He began to breathe unsteadily. "Fifth Avenue," he croaked. "Fifth Avenue and Eighty-first Street, driver. Stop at the corner."

All he felt was that the decision was being pushed on him, and before he was ready for it. There was no time to think things out or to debate right and wrong in himself. What was he going to do about the gun? That was it. That was the one question.

And that question was still unsettled in Alec Ferguson's mind when he got out on Fifth Avenue minutes afterward. He knew the girl would wait for him now, even without being told—wait for the gun; it was her only possible salvation, and Leo's too.

A block up, at the Armstrong house, he found a uniformed patrolman on duty in the front hall. "Inspector Burnett," Alec Ferguson said, his voice level enough, but his eyes shadowed darkly under their thick, overhanging black eyebrows. "Could I see him a minute?"

"Why, sure," the patrolman said, recognizing Alec at once, though not quite comfortably. "Sure, Sergeant. Just wait a minute, huh? I think he's expecting you."

Then Alec Ferguson found himself alone in the Armstrong hall, all alone. A sign? An indication for him? He saw a cabinet set flush to the rug, with no space under it; a few chairs, with nothing at all under them; and a gracefully looped black-and-white drape hanging beside him. It bellied low over the rug, concealing that particular area of it. Under there, Alec Ferguson told himself. The one place.

He swallowed, hearing male voices in the living room, and voices and movement upstairs also. Past the draperies he saw two homicide men talking near a fireplace and another dialing a telephone number, his back turned; then he got down on one knee, as if his shoelace needed tying. His hand slid under the draperies, touched something hard, and froze to it. A minute later, when the patrolman came downstairs with Wallac Burnett, Alec Ferguson had the gun in his pocket. They had probably looked for a gun, but not thoroughly—they had no reason to suspect it had been left behind.

"Over here," Inspector Burnett told him—gray suit as usual, snappy gray hat, wearily harassed manner, wizened features. "Where it's a bit more private, Sergeant."

They went into a small room on the other side of the entrance hall, a comfortable-looking room lined with books, with a couple of leather chairs in it, a desk, and a few lamps. There was a window behind them. A soft breeze ruffled the curtains.

"Well," Burnett said, immediately moving around to the other side of the desk and thus putting

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the proper official distance between them. "I don't suppose there's much sense in trying to pretty the thing up, Sergeant. You know how it looks, don't you? Bad, I'm afraid, damned bad."

"Yes, sir," Alec Ferguson said, discovering now that even this part of it had become comparatively simple for him. He had only to look at Burnett in a steady and unflinching manner—the old Alec Ferguson manner. "They told me."

"Of course. They had to," Burnett said. "Well, what kind of boy is he, Sergeant? Do you suppose he could have—well, got eased onto the wrong track somehow?"

Which was exactly the question Alec Ferguson had been posing to himself for the past hour or so. What kind of boy, indeed? He hadn't known before, or couldn't decide; but now the very quietness and simplicity of Burnett's question made him feel that he had denied the boy to himself, and in a way the boy would never have denied him.

"The kind of boy I made," he said, his lips quivering the least bit. "The kind I brought up, sir. Now you've been decent enough to ask me the straight question, and I'll do my best to give you the straight answer. It wasn't Leo Ferguson did this thing—it couldn't be. There's lies somewhere, Inspector."

And at least that much didn't have to be pretended; it became, suddenly and overwhelmingly, nothing more than the exact truth for Alec Ferguson. But the gun—and Gloria Morris? A profuse sweat came out on him; he turned away from Burnett and then back again with the expression of a dumb animal suffering. There was a question of right and wrong here—and there should be two Fergusons standing up to it, father and son!

At that thought Alec Ferguson couldn't help what he did. It seemed to be something that had been decided for Alec Ferguson many years ago, not at this instant. He took out the gun, looked at it, then looked at Burnett.

"There it is," he said thickly. "And God help me! There's what you've been searching for. And the girl, sir—she's in a taxicab at the next corner. I couldn't seem to get the thing straight in my head with Jack Cleary walking in on me tonight, and that other fellow—but I have now. And I tell you—" His voice faltered; he made an inarticulate but desperately appealing gesture at Inspector Burnett. "I tell you it wasn't my boy, sir. He'll give you the truth about this, because I taught it to him. And if I ever knew him at all—"

"Sit down," Burnett said quietly. "And don't get excited, Sergeant. We'll bring her in here right now. . ."

Burnett went out. Alec Ferguson sat down, but with all that

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fine breathless passion dying away in him, and very suddenly. At last he had made his affirmation of faith in Leo Ferguson, and in the only way that it was possible for him to make it. But now? He clasped his hands, pounded them softly against the desk, and rocked from side to side. Not quite two minutes afterward he heard a shot from the direction of 81st Street, then another, then two more.

Leo? . . .

He could only cross himself slowly and shakily—not a thought in him, not an adequate prayer, not an emotion left. Then he straightened as though under some sort of invisible burden, and his grim and weather-beaten old face set like mottled, dirty gray marble.

Out in the hall Wallace Burnett sprinted past, then the patrolman. Alec followed.

Gloria Morris was at the corner of 81st Street, standing between the cab driver and a detective. The sister was also there. But the sister was on her knees, cradling a man's head before her, and screaming out at Inspector Burnett madly. Under her, and just a split second before the violent physical nausea took over in Alec Ferguson, he found himself looking down not at Leo, but at the black, curly hair and the dead face of Tom Foley.

"Well, of course," Wallace Burnett said. "Just tell yourself that it was Foley's gun the whole time, Sergeant, not Leo's, and then it begins to fall right into place, doesn't it? He couldn't come back here and get the gun himself, and Gloria Morris couldn't—*but maybe you could!* You were a cop, weren't you? And you were something more than that. You were Leo Ferguson's old man.

"That's why he decided to play this real cute. He hustled right back to Monahan's to set up that phony alibi for us; then, over at your place, when he saw how the wind was blowing, he acts like's he's sticking up for Leo, defending him. The minute he got you started over here, though, he must have prompted that sweetheart of his by telephone and bullied her into telling you that Leo did it. Sure! They figured you'd get the gun not for them but for Leo, and drop it into the middle of the East River. Maybe you wouldn't recognize the gun itself; but Leo could have bought it somewhere without telling you. Why not?"

It was a great effort for Alec Ferguson to get it all straightened out in his head. He looked up helplessly in the Armstrong living room and young Leo Ferguson, paged not quite half an hour ago in Yankee Stadium, touched his shoulder with an affectionate and reassuring gesture.

"Of course," Leo said. "They thought Pop would get rid of the gun right away. And about the car, Inspector—well, Foley says

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he's got an old aunt out in Jersey that's pretty sick and that his mother wants to see her. So I lend him the car, that's all. I was going up to the ball game anyway."

"And the phone call?"

"The phone call?" Leo Ferguson blinked. But he had his mother's honest brown eyes, the brown hair too; and of course, even with creatures like Tom Foley, the same open-handed and generous manner. How had Alec ever been able to suspect, even for one second—a lump rose in his throat.

"Oh," Leo said, and his expression cleared. "You mean that insurance salesman? He phoned Monahan's around six, to sell me on some kind of car policy we'd been talking about. But it was nothing important."

"Maybe not to you," Wallace Burnett said tightly. "Only it set everything up for your friend Foley. It was just the kind of call we'd never be able to check afterward. I'd say he intended to meet you somewhere, maybe after you got off the subway out in Astoria, and get you into the car with him through some cock-and-bull story. Then it would have been pretty easy, of course, to take care of you—bury you off one of those upstate parkways. After that, Foley wouldn't have any gun to worry about—and no Leo to show up later and spill the beans on him. But he wasn't altogether sure you'd find the gun, Sergeant. So he came over here with his lady friend to see if everything was going off all right. He must have lost his head when he saw Gaines and McCoy picking up the Morris girl. He knew she'd admit everything once we started working on her. He thought he had to get her away from us—or try to."

So it had all built up from the gun, Alec Ferguson was telling himself. Very odd. From any sensible viewpoint the gun certainly had appeared to damn Leo; and yet, when the rest of it had been explained, it was the gun itself that had saved him.

Foley would have killed Leo if his father had walked out of here with the gun—and what had prevented Alec Ferguson from doing just that? An old-fashioned idea about right and wrong, wasn't it? An idea that if you had lived your life one way, believing in certain things, you couldn't really change for anything or anybody.

Yes, very odd. Alec shivered.

"Well," Leo was saying, "Foley had this thing really figured, didn't he?"

"Did he?" The Inspector meditated for a brief moment, then divided a wizened-up, quietly venomous smile between father and son. "I don't know. He knew his psychology, all right. But what he couldn't dope out—not his kind, and not in a million years either—was someone like Alec Ferguson."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT BLOCH**

TITLE: ***Sock Finish***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Hollywood, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Hollywood was filming an "epic" of the Good Old Days. They needed an oldtime comic who epitomized silent slapstick. So hasbeen Artie Ames had his chance for a comeback. A nostalgic tale of the "cat's pajama" days when "life was just a bowl of cherries."*

THE NAME OF THE VICTIM WAS Artie Ames. I doubt if you remember him. I didn't, and when he walked into my Beverly Hills office that afternoon and announced himself to my girl, I couldn't have cared less.

Of course, I didn't know he was a victim, then.

Let's get one thing straight: I try to see the people who come into the office, but I'm an agent. When I'm on the job, my first duty is to my clients. And an agent's office is Mecca for every Arab in Hollywood. Hollywood is full of Arabs without camels, Arabs with three-humped camels, Arabs with caravans of millions of imaginary camels, all looking for agents.

So I let Artie Ames sit on the mourner's bench in my outer reception room while I spent the afternoon slaving over a hot telephone. I was working out a deal with Dick Melvin, at Metromount. He wanted to sign one of my properties, Tommy Nolan, as juvenile lead for a big Cinemascope turkey they were cooking up for the Thanksgiving trade. He'd already tested Nolan and liked what he saw, and now it was just a matter of working out the minor details, such as the price. We hassled back and forth for a while and finally I nailed him down on the third callback and was just getting ready to hang up when he insisted on talking about the plot of the picture.

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It turned out that he was going to do one of those "Good Old Days" things—not a biog, but a general story on Hollywood in the 1920s. "We were going to work it up as *The Mack Sennett Story,*" he told me. "Only you know what would happen. We'd put out a big buck for rights, and then we'd have to change the whole thing, anyway. So we'll just sort of keep the feel of the period, get me? Lots of slapstick stuff, and we may hire Chester Conklin or a few of the other oldtimers who're still around. But the guy I'm really trying to get hold of is Artie Ames."

Something clicked then, and it wasn't the receiver. I took a deep breath. "Artie Ames?" I said. "Why, he happens to be in my office right now."

"You handle him?"

"Why not?" I said, which wasn't really an answer, either way.

"Can you get him over to Semple in Casting tomorrow morning?"

"Why not?" I said again.

"It isn't really much of a deal, just a bit," he told me.

"What do you mean, it isn't much of a deal?" I revved the motors just a trifle. "You want Hollywood in the 1920s? You want the spirit of slapstick comedy? The genuine spirit, the authenticity, the whole soul of the era can be summed up in just two words—Artie Ames. And you say it isn't much of a deal."

"We may go five grand," he answered.

"Talk about that later," I assured him. "You tell your man Semple to expect Artie Ames at nine."

I hung up fast, buzzed my girl, and told her to admit Artie Ames in three minutes. Then I sat back to do a little fast exercise in total recall.

Because I *still* didn't remember Artie Ames. Oh, the name rang a bell, once it was associated with the silent slapstick comedies. But I couldn't place the face. I scanned flickering images of all the two-reel clowns—Lupino Lane, Billy Dooley, Larry Semon, Lloyd Hamilton, Bobbie Vernon, Charlie Chase. I thought of the other mustached comics, like Jimmy Adams and Jimmy Finlayson, and Conklin, of course, and that great little Englishman, Billy Bevan. I came up with Al St. John before he turned into a western stooge, and Hank Mann, and even Max Davidson. I even conjured up a picture of the old trademark of Educational Comedies—*The Spice of the Program.*

But it wasn't until I thought of the music that I remembered my man.

They used to play jazz accompaniments for the comedies in the old silent days. Things like *Running Wild* and *Barney Google* and *Raggedy Ann* and *Don't Bring Lulu:* jerky, syncopated rhythms to synchronize with the jerky, synco-

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pated antics of Jack Duffy or Snub Pollard, or his sister Daphne. I don't know what they played for Buster Keaton, but Langdon usually drew *I'm Just Wild About Harry,* and Harold Lloyd was associated with *Collegiate* after *The Freshman* came out. Chaplin, naturally, had *Charlie My Boy.*

Artie Ames usually had *San.*

I placed him now. Artie Ames—two-reelers during the late Twenties. Just before talkies came in. A little guy—they were all such little guys, Stan Laurel and Monty Banks and the rest—with a peculiar makeup. He always looked like the political cartoon figure of Mr. Taxpayer or the Average Man—balding, bespectacled, bemustached, bewildered. Carried an umbrella and wore a stiff high-crowned derby. And as he raced around, the organist played *San.* Sure, I remembered Artie Ames.

Then he came in, and I didn't remember him at all.

I don't know just what I expected to see. Certainly I'm aware that a performer looks different offscreen and out of makeup. I wasn't anticipating the exaggerated eyebrows, the unnatural dark circles under the eyes, the pasty-white complexion, the sagging shoulders, the shuffling walk, the nervous flutter of the fingers.

On the other hand, I was more or less prepared to greet an elderly man, possibly even a shabby one. As far as I knew, Artie Ames went out with the talkies almost thirty years ago, and I expected that time would have taken its toll.

But Artie Ames was a complete surprise: he was a total stranger.

To begin with, he wasn't nearly as short as I'd remembered him to be. He held himself erect, he was neither hangdog nor fidgety, and he was wearing a suit made by my own tailor, who turns them out at $200 apiece. On top of all that, he wasn't old. Oh, you wouldn't peg him as a youngster, but he could pass for a man in his forties. And a well-preserved man at that, with a full head of graying hair and a face devoid of wrinkles or pouches. He didn't resemble his screen characterization of thirty years ago, and he didn't appear to be ready for a nursing home either.

When he opened his mouth to greet me by name I got the biggest surprise of all.

Artie Ames had a *basso profundo* voice.

Then it all came back to me, of course. The voice—that's what killed him. It was wrong for talkies, wrong for a slapstick comic playing a Timid Soul character. Sound slaughtered his career, just as it eventually slaughtered the career of a great artist like Buster Keaton. Now I remembered.

He told me all about it during the next few minutes. How he did bit parts, went out with tab shows during the early Thirties, how he made a whole series of films in

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Europe—for, he hastened to assure me, he was still popular abroad. "After all," he said, "I was only twenty-nine when sound came in. And a man has to do something."

"A man has to eat, too," I suggested.

He didn't like my suggestion. I could tell from the way he drew himself up stiffly in his chair. "That's never been a problem," he answered. "I own a bloc of lots down near Long Beach. No buildings on them—just oil wells."

Which, of course, explained the $200 suit. But it didn't explain what Artie Ames was doing in my office today. He cleared that up himself, immediately.

"Suppose you're wondering what I want with you," he said. "I'll make it short and sweet. The grapevine tells me that Metromount is casting for a flick about silent pics. And the word is out that they want Artie Ames. Think you can represent me?"

I didn't waste time stalling. "I already represent you. Report to Semple, in Casting, at nine tomorrow."

He didn't even blink. "I heard you were a bright boy," he said. "I guess I heard right."

"You'll test," I told him. "But don't talk contract until you check with me. It's some kind of a bit, and they mentioned five. Maybe we can raise the ante."

"Don't worry," he nodded. "The reason I came to you in the first place was because I found out you're handling young Nolan on the same deal. I know you've got an in there. But perhaps I can help matters along in my own way. Wait and see."

He bowed out, and I spent the next forty-eight hours waiting and seeing.

On his next appearance, Artie Ames was wearing another $200 suit, and a high-priced grin on his face. He told me just what the grin was worth.

"Twenty-five grand," Artie Ames exulted. "That's what Melvin said he'd go for. And he called in Sid Belter, right after he saw the test, and told him to build up my part. In fact, I'm going to work with him on the movie sequences and fatten the part myself. Use a lot of my old routines. And Melvin says he's got an idea for building all the promotion around me—make a comeback vehicle out of it. Said I didn't have to worry about my voice, either. Engineers can handle that now. You should have seen them in the screening room! They were crazy about me—I had 'em rolling in the aisles!"

Well, I've heard that kind of talk before. But the next day, when we went to Melvin's office to sign the contract, I found out that Artie Ames was telling me the truth. Dick Melvin *was* excited. And they were going to angle their publicity around the oldtime comic.

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When I saw the actual contract, made out for the $25,000 figure, my respect for Artie Ames went up several notches. He was nobody's fool. And who knows?—perhaps I had myself a valuable property. Once in a while those hasbeens make a big comeback.

Artie Ames seemed to think so, when he signed for the deal. "Give me that pen," he said. "This marks the beginning of a new career."

I nodded.

How could I know that he was signing his own death warrant?

It's a standing gag in the Industry that Hollywood people are the biggest suckers for their own publicity. That's why they believe their own ads in the trade papers and their own puffs in the columns.

Maybe so. And this may have contributed to my respect for Artie Ames in the month that followed. He certainly got a big enough buildup. Melvin and his crew of hired assassins at the studio went all out. Ames was interviewed, he was quoted, he was profiled, he was shoved into guest appearances —all carefully staged so as to get in a mention of the forthcoming picture, of course. But there was plenty about just plain Artie Ames, too. The name was getting around to a new generation. And after seeing his picture pop up all over the place, and reading copy on him day after day, I couldn't help but be aware of him.

Still, I like to believe that part of my growing affection for the man was based on his own personality. I came to know him fairly well. He dropped in at the office frequently, we managed a few luncheons together, and I even spent a couple of evenings out at his big house near Malibu.

I found out that Artie Ames was lonely. In spite of his money—and he really had it—he'd never married. And unlike many of his age group, he didn't care to associate with his contemporaries. Not for him those little social gatherings where former stars sit around and reminisce.

"Who needs those horses' necks?" he scoffed. "They're washed up, finished." Ames always lapsed into the slang of the Twenties when he got excited. "Why should I waste my time listening to the sad story of how they faw down go boom? Far as I'm concerned, life is just a bowl of cherries."

That's something else I found out about Artie Ames. He had never retired. In his own mind he was still a star. He had never stopped being a star. He showed me his press-books. The clippings were up-to-date. The fact that most of the rave reviews of the past twenty-five years were printed in French or Spanish or Italian didn't faze him a bit. All he knew was that somewhere people still enjoyed his work. Whether they called him "Artie" or "Arturo" didn't

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matter. He was a comedian, he worked for an audience, and laughter knows no language barrier.

"I'm going to show these smart alecks around town how wrong they were," he insisted. "When they see the routines I've worked up for this picture, they'll be sorry about passing me up all these years. Comedy doesn't change. The good stuff is always good. And there isn't much competition any more. What have they got today? They got Lou Costello! Jerry Lewis!"

Here he went into an impromptu imitation of the latter, and for a moment I was amazed by the startling transformation in the man. He aped Jerry Lewis perfectly. His miming captured Lewis's gestures and facial expressions precisely, but caricatured the caricature. He managed to burlesque Lewis's burlesquing. And all done so easily, so assuredly.

He could discuss the theory of comedy with the same ease and assurance. Of course he talked about the old days, but he did so with complete authority. He spoke about the grotesques—Kalla Pasha, who was too hairy, and Mack Swain, who was too fat, and Slim Summerville, who was too thin, and Ben Turpin, whose eyes were too crossed. He explained the difference between the exaggerations of a Ford Sterling and the unappreciated subtlety of Charlie Chaplin's brother, Syd. His conversation was spotted with allusions to half-forgotten figures—Charlie Murray and Louise Fazenda and Mabel Normand and the team of Hale and Hardy. Yes, Alan Hale had worked with Oliver Hardy before Stan Laurel came along—but that priceless bit of knowledge isn't likely to win anybody $64,000 on a quiz show.

Still I was interested, and more interested when he demonstrated some of the comedy bits he'd planned.

So was the studio.

I was on hand when they started filming. Artie Ames had been assigned to the First Production Unit, because they planned to shoot his stuff in advance of the rest of the picture. He wasn't in the "story" of the film itself: he merely appeared in the scenes revolving around the oldtime movie-making.

Seeing him in action took me back thirty years. Oh, the studio was new, and the sound stage was modern, and the technicians used all the latest equipment—but Artie Ames was unchanged. In costume and makeup, he was the comic of 1929, and the routines he'd worked out were definitely of that vintage.

The amazing thing about it was that he was funny. Not only to me, but to everyone on the set—to the props, the grips, the gaffers, and the bit players. More important, he was funny to Dick Melvin and to Sid Belter, the writer. Sev-

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eral times during the first day's shooting, he "broke up" the rest of the cast, just by his ad libs. It was all strictly pantomime stuff, you understand, but with the perfect timing and the deft precision common to many of the silent comedians who worked without benefit of a crew of gag writers, or even the assistance of a written script.

"Wonderful!" Melvin exulted to me. "At this rate, he'll steal the picture." Then he scowled darkly. "Have to do something about that," he muttered to himself. "Miss Swivel-hips won't like it."

Sid Belter chewed his pipe. "Don't worry, sweetheart," he said. "You saw the script. She's all taken care of. Plenty of close-ups, lots of nice, simple, two-syllable dialogue. The audience will know who's the star."

"Well, they're not going to remember her when this character is on the screen," Dick Melvin said. "Maybe we made a mistake, letting him build up those routines."

"Forget it," Belter answered. "He's great. Just what we needed. Besides, he works fast—we'll have all his stuff in the can before the week is out, except for the one scene with Miss Swivel-hips. And we can always chop it up, later."

I didn't say anything. I was beginning to worry a little, because I'd forgotten that this was supposed to be a starring vehicle for Miss Swivel-hips, as they called her.

Perhaps it would be safer if that's what I called her, too. Actually, her real name doesn't matter—she never used it anyway. None of the Miss Swivel-hips of Hollywood ever use their real name. It's part of the pattern.

Miss Swivel-hips was a gorgeous blonde. She used a screen name, and like most Hollywood blondes, she was originally a brunette. Her history was standard, too. Product of the usual broken household, violated at the age of nine, or was it ten (her astrologer would probably know the exact date), and married in her teens to some Okie motorcycle cowboy or the equivalent. A few years of knocking around, some dubious experiences as a model, and then —Hollywood and the golden transformation.

Now, of course, Miss Swivel-hips had already arrived. Her every word, opinion, or wisecrack was dutifully chronicled in the public prints, her manifold romances detailed, and her acting skill extolled. The fact that words, opinions, wisecracks and even the romances were mainly the creations of press agents didn't really matter. Nor did her acting skill, which was virtually non-existent. What did matter was that Miss Swivel-hips commanded $150,000 per picture. Her contract was real

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—possibly the only real thing about her, except a 39-inch bust and a torso that was rapidly becoming a trademark.

So, when the day's shooting was completed, and Artie Ames gave me a perspiring welcome in his dressing room, I was more concerned about Miss Swivel-hips than I was with my client's immediate reaction.

"How'd you like it?" he greeted me. "Wasn't it the cat's pajamas?"

I nodded, wincing a little at the dated slang. Maybe Artie Ames was the cat's pajamas, but I couldn't help thinking of another pajama-clad cat who wouldn't much care for his performance.

"Told you I could do it," he said, as he applied cold cream to his face. "Wait'll you see what I've got lined up next. We're going to do one of the old chase sequences. You know—twelve guys in a tin lizzie, running up the side of buildings—everything. Melvin's all excited. He's worried because he thinks I'm too old to take those prat-falls, but he doesn't know me. I've still got plenty of tricks to show him."

I wondered if Artie Ames was acrobatic enough to take another kind of a fall, in case Miss Swivel-hips decided to pull the rug out from under him.

And as he hurried through a change of clothes, I decided to broach the subject tactfully.

"You're doing a swell job," I said, truthfully. "But don't forget, they may do a little cutting later on. After all, you're not officially the star of this picture."

He grinned at me. "Don't you worry about the star of the picture," he told me. "I met her yesterday, when we went over plans for the scenes we'll be doing together."

"What did you think of her?" I asked.

"Great gal. A real trouper, that kid. Of course, she needs a little polishing, but she's got the real savvy—and she's willing to learn."

This was news to me. "Glad to hear it," I said. "It's important to get along with her, so play it diplomatic."

Artie Ames grinned again. "Don't you worry about that part," he murmured. "I'm doing all right. Reason I'm changing in such a rush is that I've got a heavy date with her tonight for dinner."

"Business?"

"Who said anything about business? Believe me, this is strictly for pleasure." He managed a third grin for himself, in the mirror. "And if you don't believe it, read Lolly's column tomorrow."

Then he dashed out.

And the next day, like a good little boy, I read Lolly's column. And Hedda's and Sid's, and all the others'.

Artie Ames hadn't been kidding. He and Miss Swivel-hips had done the town. One of the tabs

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even carried a picture of the two of them dancing, and I must admit they didn't make such an incongruous couple. He was close to thirty years her senior, but the picture didn't show it. And in many a Hollywood calendar the months of May and December are juxtaposed.

During the next ten days I didn't see anything of my client, but I got plenty of reports. Melvin kept me informed of Artie Ames's progress on the set—"Terrific, sweetheart, absolutely terrific!"—and the gossip columnists kept me informed of his progress around and on the town.

By the time the ten days were up, they were printing direct quotes from Miss Swivel-hips herself. Romance? "No comment." Engagement? "We're very good friends." What had happened to Miss Swivel-hips's supposed marriage to a wealthy Texas promoter? "Artie Ames has taught me that a laugh is worth more than a million dollars any day."

I couldn't quite believe it, but I had to. And I stopped worrying about Artie Ames. One of the movie magazines ripped out its inside spread and substituted a hastily written article titled *Old Hollywood Meets the New*, and filled it with pictures of the twosome at the beach, at her house in Bel Air, at the races. AP and UP were running squibs now, and it was getting to be news. Plenty of human interest in it, of course—even better than the days when Chaplin used to squire around some young leading lady. Because Miss Swivel-hips was an accepted celebrity and Artie Ames was making a comeback. It was quite a story while it lasted.

And all the while they were fattening him up for the kill.

When the axe was sharpened, the victim couldn't see the blade for the glitter.

He came running into my office all excited. "Did you hear about it?" he demanded. "Did you hear the news?"

"What news?" I swiveled around, facing him. "Tommy Nolan tells me the picture's almost finished, if that's what you mean. It'll be in the can before the end of the month."

"Never mind that," Artie Ames panted. "I'm talking about my footage."

"You still have a couple of scenes to shoot with your leading lady," I said. "Is that what you're so hopped up about?" I hesitated. "Or are you two planning a little announcement of some kind?"

He almost blushed. "Well, I really shouldn't say anything," he mumbled. "She wants to wait until the picture's finished, see? Oh, she's a great kid—the cat's meow! You ought to see us Charleston—"

"This is an announcement?" I inquired.

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"Oh, I forgot." I could see the excitement mount again. He was practically dancing across my carpet. "It's the Sullivan show—they're going to do a special preview bit on the Ed Sullivan show, next month! It's all set. And they're using one of my scenes!"

I stopped swiveling and sat up straight. "Big deal," I said.

"It must be, or else Melvin wouldn't have gone to all that expense. Know what he did? He had my scene processed in advance—stuck on the sound track and a special musical score, just for TV showing. This is *it*, kid!"

This was indeed it, if true.

"They're running the print tomorrow morning at eleven, for Dick Melvin and all the big shots," Artie announced. "You be there?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," I assured him.

And I didn't.

The next morning at eleven I was sitting in one of those nice, soft executive chairs in the Producer's Screening Room. Melvin had a cigar, Artie Ames had a cigar, I had a cigar—everybody had a cigar except Miss Swivel-hips. But she was there, big as life, at Artie's side, to witness his moment of triumph.

The lights went off, the projector began to hum—and the axe fell.

You know what the poet said? "This is the way the world ends—not with a bang, but a whimper."

Well, the poet never worked in Hollywood, or he'd have changed his story. If he'd been sitting there in the projection room with us, he'd have seen the end of Artie Ames's world and heard the sound that came with it.

Artie Ames's world ended that morning with a squeak.

It ended with a squeak, it ended with a blat, it ended with the idiot music you hear accompanying the cartoon antics of a half-witted dog.

We stared up at the vaunted chase sequence that Artie Ames had told me about, and we heard the sounds: the squeals, the brays, the barks, the cackles. When the driver of the flivver pressed the horn, some genius in the engineering department had put the blat of a foghorn on the sound track. When Artie Ames climbed out, the very pathetic picture of Mr. Average Man faced with insuperable difficulties, and cranked the motor—explosions, machine-gun fire, and the ironic mockery of an atomic bomb explosion. Ames faced the camera to deliver one of his rare lines of dialogue and I wondered how they'd corrected that bass voice of his. I found out as his mouth opened and a squeak emerged.

It was the nasty, subhuman vocalization of a tape recorder run in reverse.

No words emerged—just an insane gibberish.

And the gibberish continued

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throughout the sequence. The sequence itself was cut drastically, and some clever craftsman had speeded up the action until what remained was a frenzied flicker of paranoid distortion. Artie Ames's pantomimic bits were projected in a lightning-like fashion that gave him the appearance of an epileptic in full seizure. And all the while, out of his mouth, came this *Silly Symphony*, this *Loony Tune* noise.

Funny? Yes, it was funny—the way a four-year-old child thinks it's funny when the mouse puts a cannon muzzle in the cat's ear and blows the top of his head off. It was funny-grotesque, it was funny-idiotic, and most of all it was funny-cruel.

The sequence was mercifully short, much shorter than the originally filmed version, and I remembered Melvin's remark about "chopping." Only he hadn't chopped—he'd butchered. He'd ripped out the closeups, torn out the pantomime, and given the victim the voice of a pig, squealing in slaughtered agony.

When the lights went on again, I didn't look at Artie Ames. Nobody wants to see the face of a murdered man.

And Artie Ames had been murdered. They'd killed him up there on the screen. They'd killed him, and his art, and the whole genius of silent comedy. They'd laughed at the laughter, burlesqued the burlesque, ridiculed the ridiculous.

"How about that?" Melvin boomed. "Pretty tricky stuff, eh? The boys did a good job. This ought to slay 'em."

I didn't like to hear that talk about wanton destruction.

And neither did Artie Ames.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" he demanded. "You massacred a perfectly good scene."

"Massacred?" Dick Melvin's eyebrows were twin half-moons of arched astonishment. "I thought it was funny as hell. How about you, Sid? Dave, what did you think? Eddie? Mike?"

Sid and Dave and Eddie and Mike and all the others on Dick Melvin's payroll chorused together that in their personal opinions the scene was funny as hell.

Nobody bothered to ask how funny hell was, even though the hell was there, in Artie Ames's eyes.

"You doublecrossed me," he said. "You cut out all the good stuff. You speeded up the film. You put in those noises. You took out all the sympathy, all the audience identification. You made me into a goof."

"Now wait a minute, sweetheart," Dick Melvin said. "This is the picture business, remember? I'm handling production, and I know what I'm doing. I've seen the rushes we've shot so far, and I'm working for a balance. Had to cut out a lot of your stuff, Artie, because it made the picture top-

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heavy. Put too much emphasis on that oldtime atmosphere." He put his arm around the comic. "Tell you a little secret, sweetheart. You're just too good, that's all. Too damned good. Now if we were making like say a documentary about the silent movies, what you did was just fine. Hit the whole spirit of the times—just like they did it in 1927. But we're filming a story, see? A story about this boy and this girl, and how they get together and have a fight and get together again. Got to keep the emphasis where it belongs."

"But couldn't you let what you did use alone?" Artie Ames was pleading now. "Even if you cut me to one or two scenes, couldn't you let the stuff stand?"

Dick Melvin shook his head. "You didn't listen to me, sweetheart," he said, patiently. "I told you we weren't making a documentary. You do 1927 comedy, but this isn't 1927. Today's audiences, they don't care about that oldtime stuff. To them it's cornball, something to laugh at. So we're giving it the treatment—showing we can laugh at it too. Don't think I can't appreciate your kind of talent: Lord knows, I wish we had the kind of audiences who appreciated real comedy when they see it. But we can't take that chance. Got a million and a half tied up in this little epic. So I have to keep an eye on the old B.O. And I can't take the story line away from Miss Swivel-hips, either. Can I, darling?"

He turned to her, but Artie Ames cut in ahead of him.

"What do you think?" he demanded. "Don't you agree with me?"

She fluffed her curls. "Well, I don't know, Artie. After all, Mr. Melvin *is* the producer. *He* can tell what's best for the production."

Artie Ames stared at her. "But honey," he blurted. "You know what this is going to mean to me. We talked it all over. This could be my big chance—my comeback vehicle. It can make me a star again, a big star. Then you won't have to be ashamed of me. And after we're married—"

What had Artie Ames said about Miss Swivel-hips? Something to the effect that she was "the cat's meeow"?

Well, the cat was meeowing now.

"Never mind that! We're talking about the picture, and Mr. Melvin is right. You can't go around hogging scenes in my picture—"

"*Our* picture," Artie Ames said. "Remember how we talked about it, honey? This is going to be *our* picture."

The cat had claws, too.

"Come off it! I've got a career to protect, and I'm not going to let them pad out scenes for some sawed-off little nobody in a funny hat." The cat was spitting, now.

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"Grow up, Artie! We had our kicks, but you ought to know the whole deal was a publicity setup. You're a cutie and all that, but the party's over. Take a good look at yourself in the mirror sometime and then you'll see why that marriage stuff is definitely out."

Artie Ames couldn't have faced a mirror then. He couldn't face anybody. He turned to Dick Melvin, but the producer stared down at the floor.

"I get it," Ames said, and his voice was never deeper. "The old buildup routine. And I suppose that stuff you've been handing the papers about my comeback is just a lot of hooey, too."

"Well." Dick Melvin cleared his throat. "You know how it goes Artie. We figured we had a good angle to tie a story to, and we used it. Did a great little job, too—look at all the ink we got! And don't forget, we have played up your name, plenty. Maybe you'll get yourself another couple of deals out of this, after the picture is released."

"You mean after they see me in scenes like the one you just ran?" Artie Ames shook his head. "Don't try and kid me. I'm washed up, really washed up."

Then came the moment I dreaded. He looked at me and said, "Well, what about it? Are you going to let them get away with it? I've got a contract."

I opened my mouth, but Dick Melvin cut in ahead of me. His voice was harsh. "Damned right you've got a contract, Artie, and a good one. Twenty-five grand we laid out, for a job any walk-on could do with a little makeup and coaching. But we bought your name, so we could use it for the publicity angle. Your contract doesn't entitle you to write, direct, produce, cut, or edit. It calls for you to be on the set when we want you—and to do what we want you to do. So stop trying to push us around. This isn't 1927, like I said before."

Artie Ames shrugged. "All right," he said. "It's your nickel. But I'm walking out."

"Go jump, for all I care," Melvin snapped. "But remember this—you've got one more scene to shoot. The pie wagon bit. You said you wrote it, and we want it, and we're going to shoot it. What we do with it after that is our business. But next Tuesday you be on location in Malibu, bright and early, and no tricks, either. You're going to give us exactly what the contract calls for."

"Forget the scene," Artie Ames said, and he was begging now. "Just go ahead and do whatever you like. But leave me alone. Please."

"We want that scene," Melvin told him. "It'll make a sock finish."

Artie Ames nodded and shuffled out. It wasn't the comedy shuffle he used when he worked. This

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was a different kind of a shuffle—a blind one. He walked out of that screening room like a zombie.

Dick Melvin sighed and looked at me. "Sorry we had to give him the business," he said. "But he ought to have figured how it would be." He frowned. "Guess he took it pretty hard. Maybe you better go after him. He might be, you know, in a mood."

"Maybe he'll kill himself," Miss Swivel-hips said, and her voice held more excitement than concern.

I stared at her. "How could he?" I asked. "You can't kill a corpse. And he died here half an hour ago."

"Cut the melodrama," Melvin muttered. "Just see that I have a live actor on location Tuesday morning. He's got to come through with that sock finish for us."

Now I know what the score is. Maybe Dostoevsky or somebody like that could get away with a murder yarn about killing a man's soul. And maybe he could peddle a bill of goods about how more than a man's soul was killed—how a whole golden age of entertainment was slaughtered by a new era. But I can't. And if that's all there was to the Artie Ames bit, I wouldn't waste your time and mine by trying to tell it.

But there's more to it. Not much more—just *enough*.

You see, I went after Artie Ames. I went after him, and I kept after him, and I stayed with him all during the long weekend.

It wasn't easy. He wanted to drink, and I wouldn't let him. He wanted to take sleeping pills, and I hid the bottle. He wanted to cry—and this he did.

"They're all against me," he said. "I haven't got a friend left in the world."

"I'm here," I reminded him.

"Sure. You're here. Because you want to protect that precious contract. Not for the money, but because a deal is a deal, and you can't afford to let your reputation as an agent suffer."

"That's not true," I told him. "I understand. I'm all for you, Artie. To me you're one of the all-time greats."

"What's the use?" He blinked at me. "I might as well stop kidding myself. For more than twenty years I've been sitting around, giving myself the needle, telling myself that I was still a star. Banana oil!" He grinned wryly, and it was not a pleasant thing to see. "Banana oil! They stopped saying that in 1929. Forgot it, just like they forgot me. This is a new generation, isn't it? A generation that likes Miss Swivel-hips and her kind of talent. I don't belong here. You want comedy, see a cartoon. Let the little animated pictures hand you a fast boffola."

I gave him a drink then, but

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just one. "Now listen to uncle," I said. "Stop this self-pity stuff right now and get hold of yourself. You're Artie Ames. Maybe you're forgotten, maybe you're getting kicked around, but as long as I believe in you—as long as you believe in yourself—you've got a chance. There's just one thing you must remember. You're a trouper. A real trouper, out of the old school. The show must go on, that sort of thing."

"Laugh, clown, laugh!" he said, bitterly.

"All right, make fun of it. But the tradition's real. And sometimes the laugh backfires. Look at the way they sneered at Al Jolson—a beat-up old guy with a collapsed lung, box office poison, all the rest of it. He showed them. And you can show them, too. You want to win their respect? Then keep your own self-respect. Go out to Malibu next Tuesday and play it straight. Give them the scene, just as you wrote it. Give them everything you've got. You're Artie Ames—always remember that. And don't let yourself down."

Well, it sounded like the old college try, and the funny part of it was, it worked.

He perked up. I checked on him Sunday, and Monday night after I closed up shop I dropped in on him, just to see if he was in shape.

What I saw scared me, at first. In a three-day weekend he looked as if he'd aged twenty years. No, his hair hadn't turned white and his face didn't show any new wrinkles. It was just his expression—the way his eyes stared and the way he twisted his mouth. He was definitely an oldtimer, now, riding a one-way ticket.

But his deep voice was vibrant, and his gestures were animated, and he greeted me as if he was really living again. When I heard him speak, I was fooled completely. I'd forgotten that you're supposed to be afraid of a suddenly animated corpse.

"All set," he said. "Been running through the routine this afternoon. And you know what I'm going to do tonight?"

I shook my head.

"I'm going to bake me some pies," he crowed.

"Pies?"

"Sure. You know the way the bit goes, don't you? Your juvenile, Nolan, has just quarreled with Miss Swivel-hips, see? He's her director, and to make her sore he casts her in this Keystone-comedy thing, where she does this scene with me. I'm the comic driving the pie wagon and she's after me with an umbrella. I'm heading for the old cliff, but I'm too sore to notice—I quit driving, climb in back of the truck, pick up a pie, and let her have it. Right in the mush."

"The old custard pie routine, eh?"

"Melvin said we had to have

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one, to make it look like real slapstick. But it isn't custard, of course. It's blueberry. Photographs better. They've got to be real gooey to splatter just right—prop man was asking me what kind I wanted, and I told him I'd make up a batch myself. Always did in the old days."

He couldn't stop talking now, any more than he could stop twitching his mouth. "I can still hurl 'em, too. Been practising up. I used to be one of the best in the business. Almost as good as Arbuckle. Old Fatty—he was tops. He could sail two at once, one in each hand, and never miss."

I nodded. "This I've got to see," I said. "Tell you what. Suppose I pick you up tomorrow morning and drive you out to Malibu and watch the shooting."

He twitched his mouth at me, and I guess it was supposed to be a grin. "I get it. Want to show Melvin you're delivering the goods, eh? Well, why not? Come on along."

"It's not that," I said. Then I paused. "You sure you feel all right?"

"Of course. Feel great! Snapped right out of it. You gave me the word, didn't you? No sulking. Laugh, clown, laugh. The show must go on. Give Melvin his sock finish."

There was nothing else I could say, so I went away. But I worried all night, and when I showed up next morning I wasn't sure he'd be there.

But he was ready, and when I honked the horn in the driveway he came out carrying his big box of pies. He even clowned a bit for me, balancing the box ever so delicately as if it contained the Crown Jewels. And he bowed.

"Artie Ames rides again," he said. "The Last Roundup. On to the guillotine."

He never was any good at dialogue, I told myself. He was a silent comic. Or had been. Now he was just an animated corpse, a grotesque little old man who chattered frantically and twitched his mouth at me as we drove out to the roped-off location area at the edge of the big bluff overlooking the beach.

"Funny feeling," he said. "This is it, you know. The end. I'll never do it again after this one is finished. Today I'm putting on my makeup for the last time."

"Stop it," I muttered. "You'll get another break. When the picture is released, I can line up plenty of work for you."

He shook his head. "Breaks ran out for me years ago. Melvin was right. This isn't 1927 or even 1929. The new gang is in the saddle. Assembly-line producers like Melvin. Cheap dialogue writers like Sid Belter. Blondes with box office busts like Miss Swivel-hips. All they need me for is a sock finish."

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But I was still worried. Dick Melvin was very cordial, very glad to see me and Artie Ames. He was busy with the location-unit director and the studio police, and he didn't seem to notice how Artie Ames looked when he arrived. I was glad of that, because I was sweating it out, wondering if the comic was really on the verge of a crack-up. I only hoped he'd do the scene right on the first take and get out before there was any trouble.

Miss Swivel-hips was ready, emerging from the makeup tent, and somebody drove the pie wagon into position while the cameramen lined up their shots. The scene called for Artie Ames to drive the wagon slowly toward the edge of the bluff while Miss Swivel-hips pursued him with the umbrella. Then he'd appear at the rear of the wagon and hurl the pie. Actually, of course, the wagon would have a driver up front. They'd stop action then and shoot another scene where the pie wagon apparently went over the cliff. That would come this afternoon.

Dick Melvin explained it to me, and to Miss Swivel-hips, who seemed calm enough. And then Artie Ames came on. The old Artie Ames, in makeup, carrying his pies over to the wagon and loping back in a way that got a laugh out of the camera crew.

His painted mouth smiled at Melvin and Miss Swivel-hips and me. They didn't notice anything wrong. I was beginning to feel a bit better, too. Maybe he'd carry it off yet.

Melvin must have felt the relief too, because he patted Artie Ames on the shoulder and said, "How about it, sweetheart? Want to take a dry run, or should we just roll 'em right away?"

Artie Ames gave him his clown's grin. "I'm ready if you're ready," he said. "I always did it in one take back in '27. Don't worry —this one will be right."

So they lined up, and Miss Swivel-hips ran into camera range, whacking Artie Ames over the head with a big old-fashioned umbrella. And he gave little hops, wincing comically—the Beast belabored by Beauty—and then he floundered into the pie wagon as it started to move.

Miss Swivel-hips chased the wagon, brandishing the umbrella. The wagon headed slowly for the edge of the cliff.

Then something odd happened. A body dropped out of the cab of the wagon. I recognized the regular driver. He fell easily, as though pushed off-balance, and picked himself up at once. He hadn't been hurt.

Still, it was enough for the director to yell, "Cut!" And the cameras stopped turning.

But the wagon kept on rolling, and all at once Artie Ames appeared at the rear. He stood there

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grinning, balancing a pie in one hand. Miss Swivel-hips stopped and stared up at him. She looked statuesque and lovely.

Artie Ames peered down, as the wagon rolled away toward the cliff-edge. The direct sunlight hit his face, and I could see the white, clownlike makeup. Beneath it I could see his lips twitching, and I could see his eyes.

There was nothing funny about the way he looked.

Then he said something. I guess I'm the only one who heard it, because a moment later he hurled the pie, and a moment after that the pie wagon went over the cliff, and Artie Ames went with it.

That was the end. The end of the scene, the end of the picture, the end of Dick Melvin's production, and the end of Miss Swivel-hip's career. But Artie Ames had the last word.

"To hell with that laugh, clown, laugh business!" he yelled. And then came the pie—the pie that hit Miss Swivel-hips in the face, the pie that Artie Ames had made himself—and carefully filled with TNT.

He gave them their sock finish, all right.

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

Next Month	Rufus King, Patrick Quentin, Agatha Christie, Herbert Brean, Shirley Barker
January issue	ALL-NEW ISSUE including Whit Masterson, Christianna Brand, Mignon G. Eberhart
February issue	a new novelette by George Harmon Coxe; also Cornell Woolrich and Ellery Queen

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ARTHUR GORDON**

TITLE: ***Power of the Moon***

TYPE: Bedtime Story

LOCALE: Florida Keys

TIME: 1957—don't forget that!

COMMENTS: *Judge McIntosh disappeared six years ago—simply vanished one moonlit summer night and was never heard of again. Then a mullet fisherman came back from Hurricane Pass with an oilskin slicker . . .*

NOT AT ALL, NOT AT ALL, I'M delighted you stopped in! We don't get many visitors down here this time of year. People are afraid of hurricanes, I suppose. Or perhaps they think the Florida Keys in summer are hotter than they really are. Anyway, it's good to see you after all this time. You like bourbon, don't you? Thought I seemed to remember. Say when . . .

I'm sorry Sally's not here; she flew up to Asheville last Friday. Partly to see our new grandchild, partly to get a breath of mountain air. She'll be back on Tuesday, thank goodness; I don't like rattling around by myself. I'd have gone with her, but I'm just finishing up the book. What? Oh, a ponderous thing on administrative law—hardly the sort of stuff *you* write . . . Cheers!

You know, I *am* glad you decided to stop in. If you think I'm a little jumpy, you're right. And if you catch me staring over your head as if I thought that raincoat behind you might vanish into thin air—well, you wouldn't be so far wrong about that, either. Truth is, I had the damnedest experience today. Incredible, really! My poor old legal mind keeps trying to reject the whole thing, but not even a lawyer can argue away facts.

Facts, that's what they are, facts! Look, I know it's rude to treat a guest this way, but would you mind listening to me for a little while? It's not very late; you can

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be back in Miami, easily, by midnight. Perhaps if I talk to someone about all this, I can get it off my mind. Partly off, at least. The whiskey's there by your elbow. I'll try to be as brief and—and objective as possible. Although it's pretty hard to be objective when—well, you'll see.

Just before you rang the bell, I was thinking that this is a strange place to live. Down here in the Keys, I mean. Oh, Sally and I love it—we wouldn't change any of it. But everything's a little exaggerated, a little out of scale. The sun's too hot, the moon's too bright, the sea's too blue. Maybe people's emotions and perceptions can get a little intensified too; maybe that's what's happening to me. I just don't know *what* to think. Anyway . . .

Do you remember, six years ago, the disappearance of Judge Andrew McIntosh? I'm sure you do: the papers were full of it. It was a terrible shock to me, I can tell you that—the Judge was just about the best friend I ever had. He was a big, smiling man with brilliant blue eyes and a mane of silver hair. He was tremendously gifted and universally admired. He lived in Fort Lauderdale, not a hundred miles from here. That was the last place he was seen. One moonlit summer night he simply vanished.

No doubt you remember all the frantic conjectures: amnesia, kidnaping, revenge-murder. None was ever proved. The usual motives for deliberate disappearance just didn't exist. Andy McIntosh had no secret life, nothing to conceal. His affairs were in perfect order—most of his money was bequeathed to various charities. I knew that, because I had redrawn his will for him after Marian's death. Marian was Andy's wife. She was drowned, tragically, in the Fall of 1948 . . .

Marian's death was a grievous loss to Sally and me; for years the four of us had been very close. All of us loved the sea: sun and salt water, fishing and boats. Every spring Sally and I would run our cruiser up to Boca Grande for the tarpon fishing, and Marian and Andy would come over from Fort Lauderdale and meet us there. Those were great days.

They owned a small island, too, not so very far from where we're sitting right now. Honeymoon Island, they called it, because they spent part of their wedding trip there. The house wasn't much more than a shack, and they kept it that way deliberately. You know: oil lamps, kerosene stove, hand-pumped water. Andy wouldn't even have a radio. He wanted one place, he said, where he could get completely away from gadgets.

He was an extraordinary person—it's important that you understand that. For sheer intellectual power, I've never known anyone

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to compare with him. He was a magnificent jurist, of course. He was also a brilliant mathematician. One of his hobbies was astronomy; he had a telescope mounted on the roof of his Fort Lauderdale house. A Harvard professor once told me that if Andy hadn't chosen to be a lawyer, he might easily have become a great nuclear physicist.

But the strongest thing about the man—now, remember this—and the most constant and enduring, was his love for his wife. They had no children; her death left him all alone. When she was drowned, Andy wasn't even in Florida—he was away, in Washington. I was afraid the shock might break him down. It didn't: he was too strong a person. But it did change him; it seemed to drive him *into* himself.

He was pleasant to everyone, as always, and kept on with his work. But he cut his social life down almost to nothing. All his evenings were spent in the little room at the top of his house where he kept the telescope—it was no toy, that thing—and whenever I visited him there, the floor was always littered with scraps of paper bearing mathematical symbols and equations. I had a long talk with him one night, trying to get him to come down here and visit us. He finally said he would—but he never did. Less than a week later he disappeared.

I felt as if I'd lost my own brother. For about two years I followed every move the police and other agencies made. But you fight against the inevitable for just so long, then you have to accept it. Marian and Andy were gone; Sally and I were still around. We remembered them with as much affection as ever, but we mentioned them less and less. Until this morning . . .

This morning I woke up feeling fine—missing Sally, sure, but otherwise fine. Right after breakfast I went down to the dock in front of the house. I figured I could put one coat of paint on the skiff and still get to work on my book by nine o'clock. The tide was very high—the moon was full last night, you know. The bay was like a sheet of glass, and right across it, heading for our dock, came a mullet fisherman's boat. It was a dingy eighteen-footer with a half cabin forward and nets piled high in the cockpit. Paint was peeling off the hull, the gunwales were crusted with mud—oh, it looked a mess!

So did its owner. He was a tall wreck of a man, unshaven, dressed in greasy dungarees and muddy boots. I knew him, all right—I know most of the fishermen around here. It was Jeb Hunnicutt, part-time mullet-netter, part-time alcoholic.

He cut his engine and coasted up to the dock, and believe me, he was a sorry-looking sight.

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Under the stubble of beard and the surface tan, his face looked shrunken and pale. His eyes were bloodshot, and when he took his hand from the wheel I could see the big, leathery fingers tremble. He wasn't drunk, but I knew he had been—very recently. He looked like a man with ten thousand hangovers all rolled into one.

He didn't say a word. When his boat nudged the dock he reached down, picked up a raincoat, and tossed it at my feet. It was an oilskin slicker that looked as if it had seen better days. It's hanging there on the wall, behind you. If you turn your head, you'll see that it has my name stenciled right across the shoulders: *J. Hammond.*

You know how it is when the utterly unexpected pounces on you: you feel confused, almost stunned. I stared at the coat, remembering the last time I'd seen it. The sun was blazing down, white and hot, but I felt something like a little cold wind blow against my spine. Hunnicutt was already shoving off, but I called him back. I asked him where he got the coat.

He didn't want to tell me. His manner was very strange—half surly and half frightened, as if he wanted no part of me, and certainly no part of that coat. I don't think he'd have stayed if I had offered him money. But I offered him something that was irresistible: I offered him a drink.

I had some whiskey on the cruiser—she was moored right there. I poured him a stiff jolt and offered him the rest of the bottle if he'd tell me where he got the coat.

So he told me. Slowly, at first, then faster as the whiskey loosened him up. He wasn't lying; I've spent too many years in courtrooms not to know. Besides, he had neither the imagination nor the motive to invent anything. He just sat there in his filthy old boat, staring at the glass in his hand, looking up at me now and then with a queer defiant expression, as if he half expected me to contradict him, or call him a liar or worse. But I didn't. I just stood there and listened.

The afternoon before, he said, he'd been coming to the end of a four-day binge, one of the worst he could remember. He'd run out of both money and liquor, but near sundown he traded his spare anchor for a pint of white lightning—they still make that stuff around here—and shoved off in his boat. No matter how drunk he got, he could always find his way around the Keys. The weather was fine. He planned to hole up somewhere near Hurricane Pass, drink his pint, sleep it off, and set his nets for mullet in the morning.

Apparently he kept to his plan pretty well, except that the pint was half gone by the time the moon rose. That raw corn whis-

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key is paralyzing stuff. Somewhere down around the Pass he cut his engine and finished the pint. Then, he said, he did something he'd never done in his life: he passed out with the full moon shining right in his face.

He seemed to consider this very significant. I didn't ask him why; I was afraid to interrupt him at all. But I'm sure you've heard the old tales that fishermen tell about the power of the moon. I'm sure you know, too, the derivation of the word "lunatic."

Later—he wasn't sure how much later—he became aware of feeling cold. The moonlight was gone and a chill rain was falling. The boat was aground. This didn't bother him much; his fisherman's instincts told him the tide was coming in. He had no idea where he was, but he saw a light flickering through the rain. He decided to walk to it through the shoal water and find out.

It wasn't difficult; in thirty yards he was on dry land. The light was coming from the window of a cabin set back in the shallow dunes. He went up to the door and knocked.

It was opened promptly, he said, by a big, dark-haired, friendly man who asked him in out of the rain and gave him his position exactly, in terms of markers and channel buoys. The man's wife—she was a pretty little thing—offered to brew him some coffee. He thanked her and refused, saying he had to get back to his boat before the tide floated it. But she seemed worried because he was so wet and cold, and when he opened the door to go she unhooked a raincoat from a peg on the wall. It was an extra one, she said; a friend of theirs had left it the week before. She didn't think the friend would mind . . .

He thanked them both, took the coat, and went back the way he had come. His boat was still aground, so he climbed aboard and sat down in the cockpit to wait until she was afloat—and suddenly he woke up.

It *must* have been a dream, he said, because instead of feeling well and strong he now felt sick and miserable. There was no rain; the cockpit wasn't even wet. The moon was no longer shining in his face—a corner of the cabin had cut it off. The boat wasn't aground; it was floating right in the middle of Hurricane Pass. Everything was just as it had been when he passed out—except for three things. His boots were wet, his clothes were damp, and he was wearing a raincoat. *That* raincoat, just behind you on the wall!

No, wait a minute, please; I'm not quite through. I gave Jeb Hunnicutt the bottle of whiskey and let him go. I watched his boat grow smaller and smaller. Finally I picked up the raincoat. There was a bulge in the right-hand

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pocket. I raised the flap and pulled out a newspaper, folded flat. It felt slightly damp, but it didn't look very old. To tell you the truth, for one panicky moment I thought of throwing it into the bay—and the coat along with it. But I didn't. I smoothed it out so that the front-page headline jumped up at me. So did the date. The headline said: *Edward Gives Up Throne.* The date was December 12, 1936.

I don't know how long I stood there, staring at that front page. Finally I came back to the house. From the bookshelf over there I took down one of those little leather-covered diaries, the volume for 1936. I found the entry I was looking for. Here it is, if you can read my writing. *December 12-15: spent three days on the island with Marian and Andy. Fished and had a fine, lazy time.*

Sure, you can examine the newspaper! Look at the coat, too, while you're at it! Those are the facts I was talking about—the tangible, visible facts. I've been wrestling with them all day trying not to believe my common sense. But I'm a lawyer, trained to respect facts and draw conclusions from them. In this case I can draw only one conclusion—maybe you've guessed what it is. It explains what happened to Andy McIntosh. It's an answer to the riddle of his disappearance.

He went back, don't you see? *He went back in time!* I can't tell you what methods he used, what fantastic techniques of mathematics or of mind. But somehow he found or created a fold in the tapestry of duration; somehow he got through, just as poor old sodden Jeb Hunnicutt slipped through for a few bewildering moments last night. Jeb came back, but Andy didn't. He's there on Honeymoon Island with Marian. He's there *right now,* only for them it isn't this year at all—it's 1936; and they're young and alive and terribly in love!

Oh, I know it sounds insane, but I've thought about this all day, and there's no other explanation—none! The raincoat's real, isn't it? That newspaper in your hands isn't an illusion, is it?

And there's one thing I forgot to tell you. That channel, Hurricane Pass, is only a few years old. It was cut by the terrible storm of '48—*the storm that destroyed Andy's island and everything on it including his wife!* But I'm sure he and Marian can't foresee that storm. They still have a dozen happy years ahead of them . . .

I know what Sally will say about all this. She'll say that love is stronger than anything—stronger than space, stronger than time. If that's true, then maybe they *are* out there in their little cabin, on a different time-level from us, but *there.* I hope so. I think so! And I wish them, both of them, fair weather—and Godspeed . . .

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One of Ellery's most difficult and dangerous cases

THE WRIGHTSVILLE HEIRS

by ELLERY QUEEN

WHEN SAMUEL R. LIVINGston died, his three children buried him in Twin Hill Cemetery, patted their stepmother Bella hastily, and took off for civilization. There was nothing to hold them in Wrightsville, not even their mother's grave. The first Mrs. Livingston, a Back Bay expatriate, had specified burial in Boston. "I was buried in Wrightsville," her will explained, "long enough."

Bella Bluefield had grown up next door to Sam Livingston, and what she had felt when he went to Boston for a wife she never told anyone. But when the mother of his children died, Bella was still next door waiting. Sam made her their stepmother as soon as he decently could.

"You should have been their mother, Bella," he said.

"I will be, Sam."

But she never was. Samuel, Jr., Everett, and Olivia came home from their private schools and their jaunts about Europe to peck at her cheek, make polite inquiries about her health, commend her currant pie, and then forgot her existence. They treated her from the first with affectionate amusement, as if she were a quaint old family retainer.

After their father's death, aside from a rare well-bred note from Samuel, Jr., an occasional jocular postcard from Everett, or another wedding announcement from Olivia, they dropped out of Bella Livingston's life.

So she grew old alone, trying to fill the gaps with the committee meetings and organizational luncheons so dear to old ladies everywhere. When Dr. Farnham began warning her about her heart, she took Amy Upham to live with her.

Amy hailed from the lower end of Hill Drive, where the shade trees were tallest and the houses predated the Revolution. An orphan, she had been brought up by her widowed uncle, Dr. Horace Upham, whose practise among the poor of Low Village was the largest and least "paying" in Wrightsville. Then Dr. Upham himself sickened, and during his long last illness Amy abandoned her pre-med course at Merrimac U. to nurse him. Her uncle died leaving nothing but uncollectible

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bills; the old house was sold for debts and Amy found herself without home or means of support. Bella Livingston offered both.

Amy Upham was a quick small blonde girl with clear brown eyes that occasionally veiled over, as if to shut out things. But only occasionally. For the most part those lovely eyes looked at life squarely. Somewhere she had fought a battle with bitterness, and had won. Bella Livingston's friends thought her a fine girl, with no nonsense about her; their sons thought the same, although for rather different reasons.

Amy was naturally cheerful, and she bustled about the Livingston mansion leaving order and sunshine in her wake. Dorcas Bondy and Morris Hunker, the "staff," soon came to adore her. As old Dorcas sniffed to her mistress, "What did we ever do without that pretty lamb?"—a question Mrs. Livingston had been asking herself with increasing frequency.

Sometimes the old lady was troubled. "I feel so guilty, Amy. It's no life for a young girl, especially one as pretty as you, being buried in this draughty old house."

"Buried!" Amy would laugh. "I love it—and you."

And old Bella would kiss her, knowing it was true. She had watched Amy Upham grow up—much like herself—needing someone who needed her. They never talked about the boy Amy had been engaged to, the one who was killed in Korea; or about Amy's parents, whom she could not remember.

But the old lady talked often about her stepchildren, whose careers she followed in the *Wrightsville Record* with grim interest. As the Livingston file in the *Record's* morgue grew, Bella's grimness grew with it.

So Amy was surprised one day when the old lady suddenly said, "Amy, get in touch with Samuel, Jr., Everett, and Olivia and tell them—wherever they are—to come see me."

"But will they?" Amy exclaimed.

"They will if you say I want them to. They're too well-bred to refuse. Breeding," said Bella dryly, "is my stepchildren's long suit."

They arrived on a week-end in early summer.

Amy thought them charming. Olivia was like an expensive jewel, finely cut, exquisitely set, and unbreakable; but there were humanizing puffs of fatigue under her eyes, her clothes were wonderful, and she greeted Amy with no trace of the condescension Amy had expected. Everett proved a broad jovial sort, with a skin like a baked potato; he engulfed her hand and said tenderly how touched they all were for her taking care of "Mother." And Samuel, Jr., the eldest,

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seemed a darling—a tall thin stooped man with a courtly manner who might have stepped out of one of John P. Marquand's novels.

The old lady was waiting for them serenely on the lawn when Morris Hunker chauffeured them up from Wrightsville Station in the old Livingston Lincoln, and she personally directed Morris's disposition of their luggage.

"You've given us our old bedrooms," Olivia said, when they rejoined her on the lawn. "How sweet, Bella."

"It was sweet of you all to come," said the old lady sweetly. "Amy dear, have Dorcas fetch the tea at once."

When Amy returned with Dorcas and the laden tea wagon, she found them conversing amiably.

"I never could see that fellow, Sis," Samuel, Jr. was drawling. "He wore handpainted neckties."

"Which husband was that, Olivia?" the old lady asked with interest. "The Prussian baron or the French count?"

"The Spanish prince," said Olivia, wrinkling her nose.

"The one who cost you two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Oh, dear," said Olivia. "No sugar, thank you, Amy, and *lots* of lemon."

"With your figure?" smiled Amy. "Look what Dorcas's cooking is doing to mine."

"I haven't stopped looking since I arrived," said Everett. "Warm, isn't it? How about a swim, Amy?"

"Don't," said Olivia to Amy.

"Traitor," scowled Everett. "Why, Bella, GaGa's on the market again. She's between husbands, you know."

"GaGa?" said the old lady. "Oh, your newspaper name."

"So it finally got to Wrightsville," said Olivia calmly.

"Death to journalism," said Everett, raising his teacup.

"Yes, the papers haven't treated you very nicely, either, have they, Everett?" said Bella Livingston. "I've often wondered why you thought you could make money out of sports."

"An All-American nomination and that million from Father. Oh, well. Cheers."

"Let's see. Your professional football team, midget auto racing—both of those failed . . . Now you're trying to buy a basketball team, aren't you?"

"Lovely girl you have here, Bella," said Everett. "Lovely."

"Thank you, Mr. Livingston," murmured Amy.

"Ev. No, really, Amy, let's cool off in the pond."

"Don't," said Olivia again.

"And Samuel," said the old lady. "You lost yours in oil and mines, didn't you? The latest, I hear, is uranium."

"Was," said Samuel, Jr., reaching for a watercress sandwich. "Was,

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Bella. Yes, you find us all financially mortified."

"In fact," said Everett, but looking at Amy, "broke."

"There's always dear old Charles," said Olivia. "My Texas oil admirer, Bella. But Charles has such disgusting table manners."

"Marry him, GaGa," urged Everett. "For the financing in that basketball deal I'd cut him in for sixty percent. And maybe five for little you."

"Don't be vulgar."

"Don't be stupid," said Samuel, Jr. "Charlie Waggoner sold me the wells I dropped a quarter of a million in."

There was a lull. The old lady kept smiling at them. Amy began to feel uncomfortable.

"All right, Bella dear," Samuel, Jr., smiled back. "You've had your fears confirmed. Why the summons?"

"I'll tell you after supper. Herbert Wentworth's coming."

"Father's old legal beagle?"

"Old Mr. Wentworth's been dead for years, Samuel. His son took over managing the estate."

"That'll be jolly," said Everett. "At least let's walk down to the pond for a look, Amy. I'll show you where I once almost drowned GaGa."

"Show *me,*" said Oliva grimly, rising. "Excuse us?"

Samuel, Jr. wandered off after them.

When the three had disappeared, Amy said quietly, "Aren't you overexciting yourself, Mother Livingston?"

"You do know me, dear, don't you?" The old lady's cheeks were bright pink. "By the way, Olivia is taking care of Everett."

"As long as I stay out of a bathing suit, I imagine I'm safe," said Amy, smiling. "You're sure you're all right?"

"Just fine, dear."

But Amy worried about her all through dinner. Olivia talked about Cannes and Balenciaga, a rather sulky Everett diagrammed the bloodlines of a racing thoroughbred he was thinking of buying, and Samuel, Jr. gallantly commended the currant pie, while the old lady's pinkness deepened.

Herbert Wentworth arrived on the tick of eight. He was a cadaverous Yankee with a voice like a waterlogged harp.

There was no mistaking where Mr. Wentworth's sympathies lay. "I'll go over this with no hems and no haws," he announced frigidly when they were all settled in the vast museum of a drawing room. "Under the terms of Samuel R. Livingston's will each of his three children was left one million dollars, supposedly aggregating the bulk of his fortune. The widow was left the real and personal property plus the residuary estate. This was believed at the time to be just enough to care for her needs.

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"However!" Mr. Wentworth surveyed the prodigals without joy. "A secret codicil to your father's will enjoined my father, as administrator of the estate, from disclosing the true state of affairs to you; and your stepmother was directed to keep it a secret from you, too."

"Why?" demanded Everett.

His sister said, "Shut up, *darling.*"

"Because," retorted the lawyer with a smack of his dentures, "your father was worth a whole lot more than he let on, and he didn't want you to know it till you became responsible enough to handle it. Sam Livingston didn't think his children had the proper respect for capital."

"So your father left it up to me to decide," said the old lady, and at the sound of her voice they turned to stare at her, "when—if ever—you were to get it. Herbert, read the codicil."

Mr. Wentworth took a worn document from his brief case and read it through in loudly twanging tones. Then he handed it to Samuel, Jr. Samuel, Jr. read it and passed it to Everett. Everett read it and tossed it to Olivia. Olivia studied it for some time before handing it back to the lawyer.

"The codicil doesn't mention figures," Olivia said lightly. "How much does it amount to, Bella?"

The old lady looked at her, and Olivia flushed.

"For a long time I thought Sam was wrong to deprive you of the extra money just because of me. So years ago I made a will leaving everything to you three in equal shares. But—" and at the word they grew very still "—now I know that Sam was right. Give me one good reason why I should leave that money to you."

"The best reason in the world, Bella," Olivia said reasonably. "The money was Father's and we're his children."

"The money is mine, and how have you ever treated me?"

There was a silence. Amy began to wish she could get out of the room without being noticed.

"Why, Bella, very decently, I've always thought—" began Everett in a hearty tone.

"Like a mother, Everett? What date is my birthday?"

He glanced quickly at Olivia, who quickly turned to her elder brother.

"Don't look at *me,*" said Samuel, Jr. "You're perfectly right, old dear, we've been absolute swine. But Bella," her eldest stepchild said ruefully, "who else is there to leave it to?"

"Amy."

Amy almost fell off the arm of the old lady's chair. The waxy hand reached up to touch her.

"Since your father was taken from me, this child has been the only soul in the world who's cared if I live or die. She's run my

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house, fed me, read to me, managed my card parties, rubbed my feet, cheered me up, nursed me through a heart attack. She's devoted her young life to keeping me comfortable and happy. I couldn't love Amy Upham more if she were my own.

"But you *are* my husband's children," said Bella Livingston with some difficulty. "It's been very hard knowing the right thing to do. That's why I had to see you again. I know Dr. Farnham doesn't think my heart will survive another attack. I've got to make a decision one way or the other."

The stout old body struggled to rise. Amy helped her, hardly knowing what she was doing.

"I've given myself till Sunday to decide about a new will," said the old lady, and she went out leaning on Amy's arm.

That was a Friday evening.

At seven thirty Sunday morning Amy, in her bathrobe, trudged upstairs from the kitchen with the old lady's ritual "wake-up" coffee, entered the master bedroom with a cheery "*Good* morning!" and found Bella Livingston glaring back at her from the curly maple bed, dead.

On Tuesday morning the shrilling of his telephone roused Ellery Queen from his sleep in Manhattan and a twanging voice identified the speaker as Attorney Herbert Wentworth calling from Wrightsville. Mr. Wentworth was sorry to be phoning so early but it was at the urgent suggestion of Mr. Queen's friend Chief of Police Dakin, and could Mr. Queen take the next plane to Wrightsville? Old Mrs. Bella Livingston had died Sunday and Chief Dakin was sure now it was murder, and a real baffler at that.

"At first, Mr. Queen," said Chief Dakin, looking more like a sorrowing Abe Lincoln than ever, "Amy thought old Bella had died of a heart attack. But something about the look of things made her phone Mr. Wentworth and me without waking up the others. On Coroner Grupp's and the lab's reports I'm satisfied now that one of those three snuck into her bedroom in the middle of the night of Saturday-Sunday, around three a.m., and held a pillow over her face till she smothered to death. The thing is, Which one? Nothing to tell that I can see, and I've questioned 'em and studied reports till I'm blue in the face."

"Murder," said Mr. Wentworth soggily, swabbing his brow.

Ellery looked the room and the reports over for the fourth time. Dakin had driven him from the airport to the mansion on the Hill, saying that with everyone over at Willis Stone's Eternal Rest Mortuary on Upper Whistling, where the services were going on, they

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would have the Livingston place to themselves.

The emptiness of the big old house had weight.

"I see nothing here, Dakin," Ellery said. "Let's talk downstairs."

In the drawing room the silence was less oppressive.

"Now, Mr. Wentworth, about the old lady's visit to your office."

"There were two visits, Mr. Queen. The first was a week ago Monday, four days before those three got to town. Morris drove her to High Village—"

"Alone?"

"Yes. She'd come in, she said, to ask me what the right wording of a holograph will would be 'in case' she wanted to write one. I gave her a sample will form, and she left."

"And her second visit?"

"Was Saturday—the morning after the conference, when she told 'em they were her heirs but she was thinking of changing her will. She used the excuse of a D.A.R. lunch in High Village to come down to my office in a taxi without anyone knowing, not even Amy. She brought with her a new will she told me she'd written out late Friday night—a will, she said, no one knew about yet."

"Decided not to wait for Sunday after all," nodded Ellery. "What does the new will provide, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Don't know. It was a single sheet, folded so only the space for signing showed. My law clerk and office girl witnessed her signature, she sealed the envelope heself in our presence, and she waited till I locked the will in my office safe."

"Somebody's in for a real shock." Dakin glanced grimly at his watch. "They're about ready to bury old Bella now."

Ellery rose. "Let's get out to the cemetery."

He was puzzled, and he thought the funeral might tell him something.

The Livingston plot on the sunny west slope of Twin Hill Cemetery smelled of breeze, grass, and grief. All the tottering Hill contingent were there, Bella Livingston's lifelong friends—Hermione Wright, the Granjon clan, the Wheelers, the Minikins, Judge Eli Martin, Emmy DuPré, and the rest; Amy Upham, her pretty face swollen, stricken, and lost; old Dorcas weeping and Morris Hunker blowing his nose; and Bella Livingston's three stepchildren tightly knotted, but with no show of false sorrow. Ellery thought it clever of them.

He watched closely as Dr. Doolittle lowered the Book and the silent scattering began. But the three Livingstons merely made the slow correct march back to the Lincoln and there waited patiently for Amy.

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And back at the house on the Hill they were unreadable, too. Chief Dakin introduced Ellery with brutal suddenness as "come up from New York to look into Bella's murder." Amy clung to Mr. Wentworth as if he were her one remaining link to the past, seeming hardly to realize why Ellery was there. But the Livingstons chatted with him charmingly; and when the lawyer produced a long envelope sealed with red wax and, clearing his throat, asked everyone to be seated, they nested down side by side in the dead woman's slipcovered sofa with martinis in their hands and just the right air of well-bred expectancy.

They remained that way while Wentworth broke the seal and took from the envelope a sheet of white onionskin paper . . . while he unfolded it and held it up to the sunlight coming through the bay window so that line after line of closely spaced handwriting showed through. Only when he read the date did they stiffen.

"'I, Bella Bluefield Livingston, residing at 410 Hill Drive, Wrightsville,'" Mr. Wentworth's damp twang informed them, "'do hereby make, publish, and declare this to be my last will and testament, *revoking all other and former wills and codicils heretofore made by me . . .*'"

So there was the ending before the story was well begun.

Everett's shrug was a masterpiece: *That's that,* it said. *Nice going, girl,* was the message of Olivia's smile to Amy. And Samuel, Jr. tossed off the rest of his martini and nodded philosophically.

And yet to one of them, Ellery thought, it must be a sickening blow.

He went over to follow the shaky but determined handwriting on the paper in Wentworth's hands as a cover for his surveillance. Provision for funeral expenses, payment of debts and taxes, the Wentworth law firm as administrator, bequests to Dorcas Bondy, Morris Hunker, and several Wrightsville charities . . . Then:

"'The property on Hill Drive, real and personal, and the income from the residue of my estate—the principal value of which totals about $1,000,000—I leave to my dear young friend Amy Upham for the duration of her lifetime. On Amy Upham's death the principal estate is to pass to my late husband's three children, Samuel, Jr., Everett, and Olivia, in equal shares, or in the event of their predecease, to their heirs or assigns.'"

Ellery could only admire them. In a body they rose and went to Amy, petrified in her chair, and congratulated her as sportsmen gracefully acknowledge a race well run and lost.

"Well, gentlemen," said Samuel,

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Jr., turning to them, "that seems to settle that."

"Yes," said Ellery, "but it doesn't settle the question of who smothered Bella Livingston three nights ago."

They looked pained.

"Do I understand from that remark, Mr. Queen," asked the tall man courteously, "that one of us is seriously suspected of having murdered our stepmother?"

"Whom else would you suggest?"

"That's not my province. Though I should think a tramp—"

"Tramps break in to steal, Mr. Livingston. Nothing was stolen or even disturbed. No sneak thief, I'm afraid."

"Then allow me to point out that Olivia, my brother, and I gain nothing by Bella's death."

"Murder is not wiped off the books," Ellery reminded him with matching courtesy, "because it fails to show a profit. The facts indicate no one involved knew your stepmother had executed a new will Saturday morning. If that's so, she was murdered Saturday night by someone who thought the old will was still in force. By someone, you see, who *would* have gained."

"And that's us." Olivia laughed. "Forgive me, darlings. I'm trying to see myself smothering Bella."

"The trouble with you fellows is," said Everett, "you have the middle-class attitude about money. It's really not that important."

"The whole notion is mad." Samuel, Jr. shrugged. "But I suppose you'll have to satisfy yourselves. Are we under house arrest, or what?"

"Let's just say," said Chief of Police Dakin, "that we're all going to stay on here for a few days till things kind of gel. I'll be in and out, but Mr. Queen and Herb Wentworth will be here to keep you company. The papers ain't on to this yet, so we ought to have a nice quiet time."

When the last light blinked out in the house, Ellery came up from the black lawn to the moon-whitened back porch and sat cautiously down in a rocker.

Having known Bella Livingston in life, he wanted very much to catch her smotherer. She had deserved a better death. But there was simply nothing to go on. He had told that to Dakin before the chief left for the night. He had told Dakin something else, too, but the old man had been skeptical. "That ain't in the cards, Mr. Queen," Dakin had said, "not with you and Wentworth here." And he had added stubbornly, "Bella was an eighth grader in the old Piney Road School when I was a skinny little firster, and she used to wipe my bloody nose when the big boys licked me. I ain't letting those three go."

But it was in the cards. What to do?

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A light step, the sigh of the screen door, and a gasp decided the issue for him.

"It's only me, Miss Upham," Ellery said, getting up. "Too warm for sleep?"

"Warm!" Amy shivered as she sat down on the top step. "I couldn't imagine who was sitting out here." She drew her bathrobe closer about her. "I'm glad it's you," she said suddenly.

"Why?"

"I don't know." She stared into the dark. "Shouldn't I be?"

"Yes," Ellery said. "You should be very glad it's me."

She turned to him then. Something in the flat blacks and whites of his moonlit face made her swollen eyes widen.

Ellery sat down on the steps beside her and took her little cold hands in his. "You strike me as a girl who's had to face a lot of unpleasant realities, Amy. I hope I'm not wrong, because I'm going to throw the book at you."

"I don't understand."

"Bella Livingston made a terrible mistake when she wrote out that new will Friday night."

"Oh, I know! She shouldn't have left me the money—"

"That wasn't her mistake. Her mistake, Amy, was in leaving you merely the income from it for your lifetime and providing that thereafter the principal go to her stepchildren."

Amy looked bewildered. "She didn't want to cut them off altogether—"

"She also didn't know one of them would kill her in the belief that the old will was in force." Ellery's hands tightened on hers. "Amy," he said urgently, "lock your door at night. Try never to be alone." She twisted to stare up at him. "That clause in the new will gives Bella Livingston's murderer a second chance. Because the only thing now that stands between him and a third of a million dollars is . . . *you.*"

Amy Upham's face went white as the moon.

"He'd kill . . . me?"

"Dakin and Wentworth don't think he'll chance it. I do. That's why, Amy, I had to warn you."

The frozen wreckage in her face made him touch her reassuringly. His touch sent everything tumbling about, and he took her in his arms.

She clung to him like a child.

"I'm afraid," Amy whispered. "I'm afraid . . ."

(Continued on page 121)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GILBERT SCHECHTMAN**

TITLE: ***Where There's a Will***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *What strange dramas so often occur behind the closed doors of a lawyer's office . . . why, sometimes even crimes are committed!*

MISS CANTWELL, THE RECEPTIONIST, looked up from her typewriter as the outer office door opened. The woman who entered was quietly dressed but even Miss Cantwell could tell that the tailored suit that she wore could have cost three hundred dollars. It took money, Miss Cantwell thought, to look really smart when you got up in the thirties. If she had money, Miss Cantwell frequently observed, she might be *Mrs.* Somebody instead of Miss Cantwell.

"I'd like to see Mr. Bartman," the woman said softly. She was obviously nervous.

"Do you have an appointment?" Miss Cantwell asked.

"No," the woman said, "but it's really very important."

"Name?" Miss Cantwell asked, her pencil poised over a pad of paper.

The woman hesitated. "Jones," she said. "Rachel Jones."

Miss Cantwell shrugged. "He's in court now. Or probably on his way back now, unless he stopped off for lunch. He could probably give you a few minutes between afternoon appointments."

"Thank you so much," the woman said with apparent relief. "May I . . ." She looked around the tiny reception room for a chair but there were only two, both behind the little railed enclosure. Miss Cantwell sat in one of them and Mrs. Epperson, who came in once a month to audit the books of of the theatrical agent who shared the office with Mr. Bartman, sat in the other.

"In there," said Miss Cantwell, motioning toward one of the two glass-enclosed offices which led off the reception room. "You can wait

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for him in his office. Just take a seat inside."

"Say," said Mrs. Epperson leaning over from her desk. "I wonder what her trouble is. Why does *she* need a lawyer?"

"She looks like money," said Miss Cantwell. "People with money get into a lot of trouble."

"I should only have that trouble," said Mrs. Epperson.

After Lydia Peacock had closed the ground-glass door behind her, her nervousness became worse. "Jerry really should have come himself," she thought. "It's his place to do this."

She let her mind wander a little as she sat down. It was better not to think of what she had to do. There had been so much to think about in the last few days—telegrams, relatives, dinners . . . the funeral of her father-in-law, that bullheaded, nasty old man . . . He had not liked her from the first.

She glanced at the law books lining the wall. Was it hard to be a lawyer, she wondered—as hard as being a businessman like Jerry, or a doctor like her brother Alfred? Was it really wrong to do what she was going to do? Was it illegal, immoral . . . ?

No, she rationalized, it was only making sure that what should be would be.

The door opened and a man entered. She jumped to her feet.

"Mr. Bartman," she began, "I'm Lydia Peacock."

He was younger than she had imagined he would be. He was dressed neatly, almost elaborately, in gray flannel and did not smoke the conventional panatella, though the conventional brief case was in his hand.

"I'm sorry to break in like this," she apologized. "I know that we haven't much time, but the matter I want to discuss is one which could . . . which could profit you." She had trouble saying the words.

The man sat down.

"My husband's father died three days ago. Undoubtedly you read it in the papers." He could hardly have missed the obituaries of H. D. Peacock—"perhaps the city's most colorful pioneer merchant," the papers had called him.

"Yes," he said.

"We know," she went on slowly, "about the later will. We know that almost a year before he died my father-in-law had you draw up a new will naming some charity as beneficiary—a new will which supersedes the old one that left everything to my husband."

She looked at his face. He could guess, of course, what she was leading up to. But how would he react? His face had a professional lack of expression. He nodded for her to continue.

"The reason my father-in-law did this was because of an imag-

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ined slight, because he felt that he was being ignored when my husband made some changes which were essential for the store." She did not mention that the changes wrested the last bit of control that her father-in-law could exercise in the business.

"Mr. Bartman," she continued, "that will is not fair and it will not stand up in court. Though you couldn't see it perhaps, Stella and Tom—the couple, you remember, who lived with him and witnessed the will—they knew then that he was no longer 'right.' They told us about it at once, of course, but it was too late for a reconciliation.

"If that will is produced it will be contested, and you know what that means, Mr. Bartman. It means two or three or even five years before the estate is closed. And it can also mean a long and profitless struggle for the charity that is now the beneficiary. I know, Mr. Bartman, that the witnesses to that will are prepared to testify that my father-in-law was suffering from the effects of extreme senility which made it impossible for him to handle his own affairs—impossible, in fact, even to dress himself or to remember things or names or faces."

"You said before," he said, "something about this being . . . profitable."

Perhaps, she thought, it was going to be as easy as Jerry anticipated. He was interested now that she had let him know where the witnesses stood. That is what he would worry about most.

"Mr. Bartman, I wonder if you can see that the new will is not only invalid but immoral. It is not the money or the real estate—we have enough. It is merely the fact that an estate, a home and belongings which my husband remembers from his childhood and which have always passed to the oldest son, is being withheld because of an old man's senile whim." Oh, no, it wasn't the $250,000—it was purely the sentiment.

"The fact is," she said, looking straight into his eyes, "it was his real wish that we have everything."

"Yes?"

She held her breath a moment. "We realize that you have performed a service for my husband's father and that in helping us you would facilitate the settlement of his estate in the way he would have really wanted. We are prepared to compensate you for your services."

She took the envelope from her purse and handed it to him.

He reached out hesitantly and took it. Then he opened the envelope, which was not sealed, and took out the money. He held it and gazed at it, but he did not count it, and for an awful moment she was afraid it was all over.

"It's ten thousand dollars," she said softly, "in hundred-dollar bills."

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"All right," he said thoughtfully, looking up at the window and away from her. "All right."

He would take it. Jerry had been right. But there was one thing more.

"Mr. Bartman," she said, speaking with more assurance now. "We would like to have the will."

"Oh, yes," he said, "the will. Please excuse me a moment." He rose and went out the door, shutting it carefully.

Jerry was right, she thought. They were all alike—when it came to money.

"Oh," said Miss Cantwell as she saw him come out of the office and back into the reception room. "Are you leaving so soon? He'll probably be in any minute. He just stopped to eat on the way."

"It's all right," the man said. "I won't wait." He winked at Mrs. Epperson and walked out.

"What'd he say he was selling?" asked Mrs. Epperson.

"I forget," answered Miss Cantwell. "Neckties or greeting cards or something."

"Those salesmen," said Mrs. Epperson. "Did you see the way he winked at me? Some nerve!"

A Modern Burglar Alarm

An inventive genius, at Hamburg, lately made proposals to the magistracy for their patronage to enable him to carry into effect a machine which he had invented to fix in houses, &c. to give notice of the approach of thieves. It was not only infallible in waking any person asleep but would at the same time ring a bell, strike a light, or, if required, fire a gun, without any necessity for the family to get out of bed. Nothing, according to the inventor, could equal the simplicity of its constitution. But notwithstanding that, he warned the public to beware of counterfeits. A rival in ways and means asserted that he had also a machine that would not only perform everything in common with the former, "but even apprehend and carry the thief before a magistrate, without giving the person robbed any further trouble!"

New York Weekly Museum, January 10, 1801.

(Contributed by Rita Gottesman)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***Once a Thief***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Mr. Parker Pyne
LOCALE:	Petra—in modern Trans-Jordan
TIME:	Between World Wars
COMMENTS:	*Is the old adage "Once a thief always a thief" true? That was Mr. Parker Pyne's problem—high on the sacrificial mount of that ancient Arab city . . .*

THE PARTY HAD HAD A LONG AND tiring day. They had started from Amman early in the morning with a temperature of ninety-eight in the shade, and had come at last—just as it was growing dark—to the camp situated in the heart of that city of fantastic and preposterous red rock which is Petra.

There were seven of them—Mr. Caleb P. Blundell, that stout and prosperous American magnate; his dark and good-looking, if somewhat taciturn, secretary, Jim Hurst; Sir Donald Marvel, M.P., a tired-looking English politician; Doctor Carver, a world-renowned elderly archeologist; a gallant Frenchman, Colonel Dubosc, on leave from Syria; Mr. Parker Pyne, not perhaps so plainly labeled with his profession, but breathing an atmosphere of British solidity; and lastly, Miss Carol Blundell—pretty, spoiled, and extremely sure of herself as the only woman among half a dozen men.

They dined in the big tent, having selected their tents or caves for sleeping in. They talked of politics in the Near East—the Englishman cautiously, the Frenchman discreetly, the American somewhat brashly, the archeologist and Mr. Parker Pyne not at all. Doctor Carver and Mr. Parker Pyne, it seemed, preferred the role of listeners. So also did Jim Hurst.

© 1933 by Agatha Christie; originally titled "The Pearl of Price"

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Then they talked of the city they had come to visit.

"It's just too romantic for words," said Carol. "To think of those—what do you call 'em?—Nabateans living here so long ago, almost before time began!"

"Hardly that," said Mr. Parker Pyne mildly. "Eh, Doctor Carver?"

"Oh, that's an affair of a mere two thousand years back, and if racketeers are romantic, then I suppose the Nabateans are too. They were a pack of wealthy blackguards, I should say, who compelled travelers to use their own caravan routes, and saw to it that all other routes were unsafe. Petra was the storehouse of their racketeering profits."

"You think they were just robbers?" asked Carol. "Just common thieves?"

"Thieves is a less romantic word, Miss Blundell. A thief suggests a petty pilferer. A robber suggests a larger canvas."

"What about a modern financier?" suggested Mr. Parker Pyne with a twinkle.

"That's one for you, Pop!" said Carol.

"A man who makes money benefits mankind," said Mr. Blundell sententiously.

"Mankind," murmured Mr. Parker Pyne, "is so ungrateful."

"What is honesty?" demanded the Frenchman. "It is a nuance, a convention. In different countries it means different things. An Arab is not ashamed of stealing. He is not ashamed of lying. With him it is from *whom* he steals or to *whom* he lies that matters."

"That is the point of view—yes," agreed Doctor Carver.

"Which shows the superiority of the West over the East," said Blundell. "When these poor creatures get education—"

Sir Donald entered languidly into the conversation. "Education is rather rot, you know. Teaches fellows a lot of useless things. What I mean is, nothing alters what you are."

"You mean?"

"Well, what I mean to say is, for instance, once a thief always a thief."

There was dead silence for a moment. Then Carol began talking feverishly about mosquitoes, and her father backed her up.

Sir Donald, a little puzzled, murmured to his neighbor, Mr. Parker Pyne, "Seems I dropped a brick—what?"

"Curious," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

What ever momentary embarrassment had been caused, one person had quite failed to notice it. The archeologist had sat silent, his eyes dreamy and abstracted. When a pause came, he spoke suddenly and abruptly.

"You know," he said, "I agree with that—at any rate, from the opposite point of view. A man's fundamentally honest, or he isn't. You can't get away from it."

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"You don't believe that sudden temptation, for instance, could turn an honest man into a criminal?" asked Mr. Parker Pyne.

"Impossible!" said Doctor Carver.

Mr. Parker Pyne shook his head gently. "I wouldn't say impossible. You see, there are so many factors to take into account. There's the breaking point, for instance."

"What do you call the breaking point?" asked young Hurst, speaking for the first time. He had a deep, rather attractive voice.

"The brain is adjusted to carry so much weight. The thing that precipitates the crisis—that turns an honest man into a dishonest one—may be a mere trifle. That is why most crimes are absurd. The cause, nine times out of ten, is that trifle of overweight—the straw that breaks the camel's back."

"It is the psychology you talk there, my friend," said the Frenchman.

"If a criminal were a psychologist, what a criminal he could be!" said Mr. Parker Pyne. "When you think that of ten people you meet, at least nine of them can be induced to act in any way you please—if you apply the right stimulus."

"Oh, explain that!" cried Carol.

"There's the bullyable man. Shout loud enough at him—and he obeys. There's the contradictory man. Bully him the opposite way from that in which you want him to go. Then there's the suggestible person, the commonest type of all. Those are the people who have *seen* a motor, because they have heard a motor horn; who *see* a postman because they hear the rattle of the letter box; who *see* a knife in a wound because they are *told* a man has been stabbed; or who will have *heard* the pistol if they are told a man has been shot."

"I don't think anyone could put that sort of stuff over on me," said Carol incredulously.

"You're too smart for that, honey," said her father.

"It is very true what you say," said the Frenchman reflectively. "The preconceived idea, it deceives the senses."

Carol yawned. "I'm going to my cave. I'm dog-tired. Abbas Effendi said we had to start early tomorrow. He's going to take us up to the place of sacrifice—whatever that is."

"It's where they sacrifice young and beautiful girls," said Sir Donald.

"Mercy, I hope not! Well, good night, all. Oh, I've dropped my earring."

Colonel Dubosc picked it up from where it had rolled across the table and returned it to her.

"Are they real?" asked Sir Donald abruptly. Discourteous for the moment, he was staring at the two large solitaire pearls at her ears.

"They're real, all right," said Carol.

"Cost me fifty thousand dollars,"

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said her father with relish. "And she screws them in so loosely that they fall off and roll about the table. Want to ruin me, girl?"

"I'd say it wouldn't ruin you even if you had to buy me a new pair," said Carol fondly.

"I guess it wouldn't," her father acquiesced. "I could buy you six pairs of earrings without noticing it in my bank balance." He looked proudly around.

"How nice for you!" said Sir Donald.

"Well, gentlemen, I think I'll turn in now," said Blundell. "Good night." Young Hurst went with him.

The other four smiled at one another, as though in sympathy over some thought.

"Well," drawled Sir Donald, "it's nice to know he wouldn't miss the money."

"They have too much money, these Americans," said Dubosc.

"It is difficult," said Mr. Parker Pyne gently, "for a rich man to be appreciated by the poor."

Dubosc laughed. "Envy and malice?" he suggested. "You are right, Monsieur. We all wish to be rich—to buy the pearl earrings several times over. Except, perhaps, Monsieur here."

He bowed to Doctor Carver who, as seemed usual with him, was once more far away. He was fiddling with a little object in his hand.

"Eh?" He roused himself. "No, I must admit I don't covet large pearls. Money is always useful, of course." His tone put it where it belonged. "But look at this," he said. "Here is something a hundred times more interesting than pearls."

"What is it?"

"It's a cylinder seal of black hematite and it's got a presentation scene engraved on it—a god introducing a suppliant to a more important enthroned god. The suppliant is carrying a kid by way of an offering, and the august god on the throne has the flies kept off him by a flunkey who wields a palm-branch fly whisk. That neat inscription mentions the man as a servant of Hammurabi, so that it must have been made just four thousand years ago."

He took a lump of plasticine from his pocket and smeared some on the table; he oiled it with a little vaseline and pressed the seal upon it, rolling it out. Then, with a penknife, he detached a square of the plasticine and levered it gently up from the table.

"You see?" he said.

The scene he had described was in the plasticine, clear and sharply defined.

For a moment the spell of the past was laid upon them all. Then, from outside, the voice of Mr. Blundell was raised unmusically.

"Say, you porters! Take my baggage out of this darned cave and into a tent! The no-see-ums

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are biting good and hard. I won't get a wink of sleep."

"No-see-ums?" Sir Donald queried.

"Probably sand flies," said Doctor Carver.

"I like his word no-see-ums," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "It's a much more suggestive name."

The party started early the following morning, getting under way after various exclamations at the color and marking of the rocks. The "rose-red" city was indeed a freak invented by Nature in her most extravagant and colorful mood. The party proceeded slowly, since Doctor Carver walked with his eyes bent on the ground, occasionally pausing to pick up small objects.

"You can always tell the archeologist—so," said Colonel Dubosc, smiling. "He regards never the sky, nor the hills, nor the beauties of nature. He walks with head bent, searching."

"Yes, but what for?" said Carol. "What are those things you're picking up, Doctor Carver?"

With a slight smile the archeologist held out a couple of muddy fragments of pottery.

"That rubbish!" cried Carol scornfully.

"Pottery is more interesting than gold," said Doctor Carver. Carol looked disbelieving.

They came to a sharp bend and passed two rock-cut tombs. The ascent was now somewhat trying. The Bedouin guards went ahead, swinging up the precipitous slopes unconcernedly, without a downward glance at the sheer drop on one side of them.

Carol looked rather pale. One guard leaned down from above and extended a hand. Hurst sprang up in front of her and held out his stick like a rail on the precipitous side. She thanked him with a glance, and a minute later stood safely on a broad path of rock. The others followed slowly. The sun was high and the heat was beginning to be felt.

At last they reached a broad plateau almost at the top. An easy climb led to the summit of a big square block of rock. Blundell signified to the guide that the party would go up alone. The Bedouins disposed themselves comfortably against the rocks and began to smoke. A few short minutes and the others had reached the summit.

It was a curiously bare place. The view was marvelous, embracing the valley on every side. They stood on a plain rectangular floor, with rock basins cut in the side and a kind of sacrificial altar against the sky.

"A heavenly place for sacrifices," said Carol with enthusiasm. "But my, they must have had a job getting the victims up here!"

"There was originally a kind of zigzag rock road," explained Doctor Carver. "We shall see traces of it as we go down the other side."

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They were some time longer commenting and talking. Then there was a tiny chink, and Doctor Carver said:

"I believe you've dropped your earring again, Miss Blundell."

Carol clapped a hand to her ear. "Why, so I have!"

Dubosc and Hurst began searching about.

"It must be here," said the Frenchman. "It can't have rolled away, because there is nowhere for it to roll to. The place is like a square box."

"Could it have rolled into a crack?" asked Carol.

"There's not a crack anywhere," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "You can see for yourself. The place is perfectly smooth. Ah, you have found something, Colonel?"

"Only a little pebble," said Dubosc, smiling and throwing it away.

Gradually a different spirit—a spirit of tension—came over the search. They were not said aloud, but the words "fifty thousand dollars" were in everybody's mind.

"You are sure you had it, Carol?" snapped her father. "I mean, perhaps you dropped it climbing up."

"I had it just as we stepped onto the plateau here," said Carol. "I know, because Doctor Carver pointed out to me that it was loose and he tightened it up for me. That's so, isn't it, Doctor?"

Doctor Carver assented. It was Sir Donald who voiced the thoughts in everybody's mind.

"This is rather an unpleasant business, Mr. Blundell," he said. "You were telling us last night the value of these earrings. If this earring is not found, and it does not look as though it will be, every one of us will be under suspicion."

"And for one, I ask to be searched," broke in Colonel Dubosc. "I do not ask, I demand it as a right!"

"Search me too," said Hurst. His voice sounded harsh.

"What does everyone else feel?" asked Sir Donald, looking around.

"An excellent idea," said Doctor Carver.

"Certainly," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"I'll be in on this too, gentlemen," said Mr. Blundell. "I've got my reasons, though I don't want to stress them."

"Just as you like, of course, Mr. Blundell," said Sir Donald courteously.

"Carol, my dear, will you go down and wait with the guides?"

Without a word the girl left them. Her face was set and grim. There was a despairing look upon it that caught the attention of Mr. Parker Pyne. He wondered just what it meant.

The search proceeded. It was drastic and thorough—and completely unsatisfactory. One thing was certain. No one was carrying the earring on his person. It was a subdued little group that negotiated the descent and listened half-

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heartedly to the guide's descriptions and information.

Mr. Parker Pyne had just finished dressing for lunch when a figure appeared at the door of his tent.

"Mr. Pyne, may I come in?"

"Certainly, my dear young lady, certainly."

Carol came in and sat down on the bed. Her face had the same grim look on it that he had noticed earlier in the day.

"You straighten out things for people when they are unhappy, don't you?" she demanded.

"I am on holiday, Miss Blundell. I am not taking any cases."

"Well, you're going to take this one," said the girl calmly. "Look here, Mr. Pyne, I'm just as wretched as anyone could be."

"What is troubling you?" he asked. "Is it this business of the earring?"

"Yes, but Jim Hurst didn't take it, Mr. Pyne. I *know* he didn't!"

"I don't quite follow you, Miss Blundell. Why should anyone assume he had?"

"Because of his record. Jim Hurst was once a thief, Mr. Pyne. He was caught in our house. I—I was sorry for him. He looked so young and desperate—"

"And so good-looking," thought Mr. Parker Pyne.

"I persuaded Pop to give him another chance to make good—my father will do anything for me. Well, he gave Jim his chance and Jim has made good. Father's come to rely on him and to trust him with all his business secrets. And in the end he'll come around altogether, or would have if this hadn't happened."

"When you say 'come around' —?"

"I mean that I want to marry Jim and he wants to marry me."

"And Sir Donald?"

"Sir Donald is Father's idea. He's not mine. Do you think I want to marry a stuffed shirt like Sir Donald?"

Without expressing any views as to this description of the young Englishman, Mr. Parker Pyne asked, "And Sir Donald himself?"

"Oh, I'm sure he thinks I'd be good for his impoverished acres," said Carol scornfully.

Mr. Parker Pyne considered the situation. "I should like to ask you about two things," he said. "Last night the remark was made, 'once a thief always a thief.' "

The girl nodded.

"I see now the reason for the embarrassment that remark seemed to cause."

"Yes, it was awkward for Jim—and for me and Pop too. I was so afraid Jim's face would give him away that I just trotted out the first remarks I could think of."

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked, "Just why did your father insist on being searched today?"

"You didn't get that? I did. Pop

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had it in his mind that I might think the whole business was a frame-up. You see, he's crazy for me to marry the Englishman. Well, he wanted to show me that he hadn't framed Jim."

"Dear me," said Mr. Parker Pyne, "this is all very illuminating. In a general sense, I mean. It hardly helps us in our particular inquiry."

"You're not going to back out, are you?"

"No, no." He was silent a moment, then he said, "What is it exactly you want me to do, Miss Carol?"

"Prove it wasn't Jim who took that pearl."

"And suppose—excuse me—that it was?"

"If you think so, you're wrong—dead wrong."

"Yes, but have you really considered the case carefully? Don't you think that the pearl might prove a sudden temptation to Mr. Hurst? The sale of it would bring in a large sum of money—a foundation on which to speculate, shall we say?—which might make him independent, so that he can marry you with or without your father's consent."

"Jim didn't do it," said the girl simply.

This time Mr. Parker Pyne accepted her statement. "Well, I'll do my best."

She nodded abruptly and left the tent. Mr. Parker Pyne in his turn sat down on the bed. He gave himself up to thought. Suddenly he chuckled.

"I'm growing slow-witted," he said aloud. At lunch he was very cheerful.

The afternoon passed peacefully. Most of them slept. When Mr. Parker Pyne came into the big tent at a quarter-past four only Doctor Carver was there. He was examining some fragments of pottery.

"Ah," said Mr. Parker Pyne, drawing up a chair to the table. "Just the man I want to see. Can you let me have that bit of that plasticine you carry about?"

The doctor felt in his pockets and produced a stick of plasticine, which he offered to Mr. Parker Pyne.

"No," said Mr. Parker Pyne, waving it away, "that's not the one I want. I want the lump you had last night. To be frank, it's not the plasticine I want. It's the contents of it."

There was a pause, and then Doctor Carver said quietly. "I don't think I quite understand you."

"I think you do," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "I want Miss Blundell's pearl earring."

There was a minute's dead silence. Then Doctor Carver slipped his hand into his pocket and took out a shapeless lump of plasticine.

"Clever of you," he said. His face was expressionless.

"I wish you'd tell me about it," said Mr. Parker Pyne. His fingers were busy as he extracted a some-

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what smeared pearl earring. "Just curiosity," he added apologetically, "but I should like to hear about it."

"I'll tell you," said Doctor Carver, "if you'd tell me just how you happened to pitch upon me. You didn't see anything, did you?"

Mr. Parker Pyne shook his head.

"No, I just thought about it," he said.

"It was really sheer accident, to start with," said the archeologist. "I was behind you all this morning and I came across it lying in front of me—it must have fallen from the girl's ear a moment before. She hadn't noticed it. Nobody had. I picked it up and put it into my pocket, meaning to return it as soon as I caught up with her. But I forgot.

"And then, halfway up that climb, I began to think. The jewel meant nothing to the girl—her father would buy her another without even noticing the cost. And it would mean a lot to me. The sale of that pearl would equip an expedition." His impassive face suddenly twitched and came to life. "Do you know the difficulty nowadays raising subscriptions for digging? No, you don't. The sale of that pearl would make everything easy. There's a site I want to dig—up in Baluchistan. There's a whole chapter of the past waiting there to be discovered. . . .

"What you said last night came into my mind—about a suggestible witness. I thought the girl was that type. As we reached the summit I told her her earring was loose. I pretended to tighten it. What I really did was to press the point of a small pencil into her ear. A few minutes later I dropped a pebble. She was quite ready to swear then that the earring had been in her ear and had just dropped off. In the meantime I pressed the pearl into a lump of plasticine in my pocket. That's my story. Not a very edifying one, I admit. Now for your turn."

"There isn't much to my story," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "You were the only man who'd picked up things from the ground—that's what made me think of you. And when Colonel Dubosc found that little pebble it was significant. It suggested the trick you'd played. And then—"

"Go on," said Doctor Carver.

"Well, you see, you'd talked about honesty a little too vehemently last night. Protesting overmuch—well, you know what Shakespeare says. It looked, somehow, as though you were trying to convince *yourself*. And you were a little too scornful about money."

The face of the man in front of him looked lined and weary. "Well, that's that," he said. "It's all up with me now. You'll give the girl back her gewgaw, I suppose? Odd thing, the barbaric instinct for ornamentation. You find it going back as far as paleolithic times. One of the first instincts of the female."

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"I think you misjudge Miss Carol," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "She has brains—and what is more, a heart. I think she will keep this business to herself."

"Father won't, though," said the archeologist.

"I think he will. You see, 'Pop' has his own reasons for keeping quiet. There's no twenty-five-thousand-dollar feel about this earring. A mere fiver would cover its value."

"You mean—?"

"Yes. The girl doesn't know. She thinks they are genuine, all right. I had my suspicions last night. Mr. Blundell talked a little too much about all the money *he* had. When things go wrong and you're caught in the slump—well, the best thing to do is to put a good face on it and bluff. Mr. Blundell was bluffing."

Suddenly Doctor Carver grinned. It was an engaging small-boy grin, strange to see on the face of an elderly man. "Then we're all poor devils together," he said.

"Exactly," said Mr. Parker Pyne and quoted, "'A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind.'"

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(Note: It is perhaps important to report—since it may affect your travel plans—that there is unfortunately no local edition available in the Soviet Union.)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ED LACY**

TITLE: ***The Real Sugar***

TYPE: Detective-Crime Story

DETECTIVE: Eddie Roberts

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Welterweight champion Sugar Hayes was one of the all-time greats. He sure loved his chow, yet he always entered the ring solid muscle and hard as nails. How come?*

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON AND I WAS hot and tired from trying to walk all over New York. It had been years since I'd seen the city and I'd been visiting all the places I used to know. I dropped into a bar for a beer and there was Jack Mally putting away a couple. Mally was an old-time lightweight turned manager, and still looked lean and tough even though his hair was gray and his face full of wrinkles. When he saw me he whooped, "Frankie! Heard you were in town with your welter."

We pumped hands and I ordered a beer. "Yeah, we blew in yesterday to start training. This is the big one, Jack. Found this kid up in Montreal, been bringing him along slow, but now we're ready to cash in, grab us the championship and a bundle of that folding money."

"Figure your boy can take the champ?"

"Chum, we both know Sugar Hayes is one of the all-time greats. If Sugar was in his prime, my boy couldn't hit him with a baseball bat. But the champ has been at it a long time and can't make 147 pounds without weakening himself. My boy can take a weakened Sugar Hayes."

Jack's thin lips formed a bitter grin. "I thought like that — once."

"I read Sugar kayo'd your boy last year."

Jack said, "Gave him such a beating he ruined him. Sugar's as greedy

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as he is good. He's made his pile. Why don't he retire, or fight the middleweights? He can't make 147 no more."

"He's a fool to risk his health sweating off pounds, but he made the weight for your boy."

"Did he?" Jack asked.

"What do you mean, did he?"

"Frankie, there was something fishy, something I never been able to explain about that fight. I been a pug, I know what conditioning is. Also I know Sugar is hard as nails, doesn't carry an ounce of fat. The day of the bout we weighed in at noon and he was two pounds over welter limit. I saw him sit in a steam cabinet until he was so weak they had to walk him to the scales. That was ten hours before the fight. Every fighter dries out before a bout, gains a few pounds by eating and drinking after the weigh-in. I've done it a hundred times. But that night when Sugar entered the ring he looked a good fifteen pounds over 147. Fifteen solid pounds of muscle. And there was nothing weak about him. I don't believe any man can gain that much weight and energy in a half-dozen hours."

"That's impossible. If he ate and drank that much, he'd be logy," I said, worried. I didn't want my kid ruined. "No welter can spot Sugar fifteen pounds and have a chance."

"It ain't human. But I don't know how he did it," Jack said. Just then a guy came in and asked the old barkeep, "Al been in yet?"

"Which Al? Big Al or Fat Al?"

The guy laughed. "Didn't know there was two. This Al is big, got bushy dark hair and . . ."

"That's Fat Al. Ain't been in."

I glanced at Jack, who was finishing his beer. "*That* give you the same idea it gave me?"

"You mean there could be . . . *two* Sugar Hayes?"

"Twins! One twin sweats and diets — weakens himself — while Sugar enters the ring strong as a bull!"

Jack nodded. "Could be, but can you prove it?"

"I'm going to try," I said.

I paid for the beers and started looking up the names of private dicks in the phone book. An Eddie Roberts had an office just around the corner.

When I entered Roberts's tiny office there was a painter in white overalls up on a ladder doing the ceiling. "Where's the dick?" I asked.

"That's me," the painter said, coming down. I guess he saw the surprise on my face, for he grinned and added, "Things are slow and I used to be a painter and . . . well . . . I'm fixing the office up a bit. What's on your mind?"

I was about to leave. I didn't want to hire any house painter trying to make a go as a detective. But there was something honest and tough about this guy's eyes — and I didn't have time to waste. I told him what I wanted.

Two hours later Roberts called and told me, "You're right. Sugar has a twin brother."

"You work fast," I said, pleased.

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"This was simple. I looked up his real name at the Boxing Commission; it's Anthony Pagano and he was born in New Haven. A buddy of mine up there checked the records. Twenty-eight years ago twins, Anthony and Francis, were born to a Mrs. Pagano. Francis must be our boy."

"Great. You've got three weeks to find him."

Ten days went by and all I heard from my detective was, "Still checking." Meantime I took a trip up to Sugar's camp and watched him work out. He looked very strong and sharp. The sports pages were full of his usual trouble of making the weight, and his manager said Sugar was starving but refused to let reporters weigh him. I was sure Sugar was over 160 pounds.

He sparred two rounds with a welter named Kayo Bridges who I knew in Buffalo. When the kid finished sparring and Sugar started stomach exercises, I asked, "Remember me, Kayo?"

"Howya Frankie? Your boy is in for a pasting. This Sugar is rough."

"Forget Sugar," I said. "How you doing?"

"So, so. This sparring is rugged, but it pays twenty-five bucks a day and board."

"Eating good here?"

"Oh, man, we eat fine. Plenty of steaks and rich food. Sugar sure loves his chow."

"Well, hope you get a break soon, Kayo," I said, walking off. So all this chatter about Sugar dieting was so much newspaper baloney!

Two days later the dick was ready for me. "Found the twin," he said. "Figured they'd keep him some place a long way from the city; that meant traveling by plane. Been checking passenger lists. The morning of Sugar's last six fights, a Francis Pagano flew in from Cuba. Supposed to be in the exporting business. Only he hasn't any office and must be a fast worker — he always leaves for Cuba the same afternoon."

"Cuba?" I repeated. "No wonder nobody has seen him! Well, this time we'll have the press and the Boxing Commission waiting for him!"

The dick shook his head. "What will that prove? No crime having a twin. If they look exactly alike — as they must — how can we stop them from slipping Francis into the weigh-in?"

"All I know," I shouted, "is we got to stop that twin! Means Sugar will have to sweat off fifteen pounds within a few hours or give up the title. And since he's a pig for dough, he'll sweat and be so weak a fly could flatten him!"

Eddie smiled. "Just leave this to me." My face must have reflected my suspicion. He added, "Look, I don't doublecross clients. Bet my fee on your boy to win by a kayo — that ought to prove I know what I'm doing."

Jack Mally was with me at the weigh-in and my boy tipped the scales at 146½. Sugar showed up a half hour late, and he looked pale as

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milk and drawn. Jack whispered, "Look at his skin! If he hasn't spent the morning in a steam bath I don't know nothing about conditioning!"

Sugar stepped on the scales and weighed 151. "Four pounds over," I told his worried manager. "You surrendering the title?"

"Nuts!" Sugar snarled. "You give me an hour to make the weight?"

"Sure, take two hours," I said.

They carted in a portable electric steam cabinet and Sugar sat in that and sweated and then a guy rubbed him down and then he sweated some more and they rubbed his hard body and put him in to cook again. This went on for an hour and when I winked at Jack, he whispered, "So what? He went through the same routine for my boy. You sure this is the real Sugar?"

I glanced over at the corner where my detective was sitting, calmly cleaning his nails. They helped Sugar over to the scales and he just made the weight. It was a little after two p.m. and he'd still be weak as a sick cat at ten p.m. that night, much too weak to go 15 rounds. I pointed to a red stain on my shoe, told Jack, "This is the *real* Sugar."

"How do you know?"

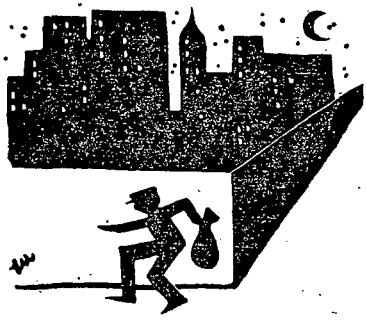
"Twins," I asked, "look alike, don't they? Except that right now Sugar's twin don't look much like Sugar."

"What?" Jack gasped, staring at the red spot. "You had him beaten up?"

"Stop it, I'm no thug," I said. "Seems this morning when Sugar's twin landed at LaGuardia there was a couple of painters on a ladder and one of them — accidentally, you understand — dropped a can of red paint on the face of Sugar's twin. Naturally the twin can't show up with a face full of paint, and give away the racket. And it takes days for this paint to wear off . . ."

Jack jumped up and down, shook my hand, and whispered hoarsely, "Let me shake hands with the manager of the new welter champ of the world!"

"And with the world's worst painter!" I added proudly.



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Recommended by Anthony Boucher—

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

There are about 300 new mystery novels published a year. Add anthologies and other collections of short stories and novelets, revivals of important books of the past, and you'll have plenty to keep you busy at a one-a-day rate.

Busy, but not always fully satisfied. This page will try to select each month a few books with more to offer than the one-a-day routine—something special in writing or in plotting . . . and often in both.

★★★★ **GIDEON'S NIGHT** *by J. J. Marric* (Harper, $2.95)

John Creasey, history's most prolific mystery novelist, can also be one of the best—and never better than when he is writing (as Marric) about Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard. Gee-Gee's NIGHT is as good as his DAY and WEEK: imperative reading.

★★★★ **ROOM TO SWING** *by Ed Lacy* (Harper, $2.95)

Touie Moore, the first Negro private eye in fiction, has his difficulties in the theoretically unsegregated North; but social problems, though acutely observed, never interfere with a powerful action story of murder in a TV package deal.

★★★ **THE RUNNING MAN** *by Ben Benson* (Mill-Morrow, $2.95)

Authenticity, firm characterization, and vigorous movement mark all Benson's novels of the Massachusetts State Police. In this one, personal friendship is a dangerous obstacle to young trooper Ralph Lindsey's solution of a brutal killing.

★★★ **PRACTISE TO DECEIVE** *by Richard & Frances Lockridge* (Lippincott, $2.75)

Among the smoothest of old professionals, the Lockridges write so engrossingly about Captain Heimrich's growing love for Susan Faye and the excitement of a hurricane in Putnam County that you never notice, till too late, how deviously they have concealed a murderer.

★★★ **ONE MINUTE PAST EIGHT** *by George Harmon Coxe* (Knopf, $2.95)

More pleasure from a solid pro. Novices can learn from Coxe how to maintain suspense against a colorfully exotic background (here Caracas); and even professionals can learn how to construct a dénouement.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **G. C. EDMONDSON**

TITLE: ***Stop Being a Sucker***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALES: San Diego, California, and Mexico

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An honestly tough, honestly sentimental story about a man who had reached a cross-roads in his life without realizing it and had a tremendous decision to make . . .*

IT WAS FRIDAY EVENING, ABOUT closing time. Burgess was wondering how much longer he was going to keep on being a sucker when this big man tooled a Cadillac in the door. It was not one of those flashy jobs where the chrome looks as if it was put on with a trowel. This car was so conservative that only careful inspection would have revealed the hopped-up motor and extra-thick glass in back.

"How about a tuneup?" the driver asked. He had an odd voice, like a whisper turned up full volume.

Burgess lifted the hood and listened. He was a slight, dark man, nearing middle age. Rubbing a hand over his quilted black cap, he said, "Mister, you tune it any finer and you'll need a pilot's license."

The driver had a wrestler's waddle with its intimation of potential violence. He bit the end off a cigar. "Alone?" he asked, glancing at the front.

"Very much so." Something about the fat man's greasy grin made Burgess wonder if he'd heard about it too. Probably. Everybody had known but Burgess.

"I hear you're quite a fisherman, Mr. Burgess," the fat man said.

Burgess tried to remember if he knew the fat man from somewhere. "I suppose you saw in the paper about me winning the yellowtail derby last month," he said.

"Nice," the fat man said, pointing at Burgess's camper truck. "Air-conditioned, four-wheel drive,

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boat on top; I bet four people could sleep in there. Why do you always go alone?"

"My wife didn't care for fishing trips in Mexico. By a strange coincidence, neither did my partner. Now, if you don't mind, I'm about to close up for the day."

"I bet every border guard knows you," the fat man persisted. "Just sees your truck and waves you right on through. Like to make a little bundle?"

Burgess caught his breath and felt the little prickle which honest men feel at these times. "Not a chance," he said. "Those customs inspectors aren't stupid. Even good old Burgess gets x-rayed once in a while, just to keep him good."

"On the way down?"

"They put up roadblocks only when somebody robs the mint. What'd you do?"

"Five yards to haul some passengers and zip the lip."

Burgess hesitated again. His partner had tapped the till and Burgess's wife at the same time. Burgess didn't feel too strongly about the wife any more, but the legal beagles had just about finished the till before partnerships marital and mechanical were dissolved. "I'll have to think about it," he said.

Almost casually, the big man brought his knee up into Burgess's solar plexus. "Take all the time you want—a whole minute," he said, puffing on the cigar.

When Burgess's breath came back, he got up from the floor. He divided his hundred and thirty pounds into the wrestler's two hundred and fifty, making allowance for the bulge under the fat man's armpit. He added five hundred dollars and divided by his chances of collecting. The result was not encouraging.

"Use your phone?" the fat man said in his roaring whisper. Without waiting for an answer, he picked it up and dialed. "Fred? Come and pick up the car." Casters screeched as he sat in Burgess's swivel chair. He backed the chair against the desk and let his bulk flow back over the flat ratebook.

Still breathing painfully, Burgess moved about locking the gas pumps, taking in the hoses and oil cans. A boy on a bicycle tossed in a paper. The fat man started reading it with one eye. The other did not leave Burgess.

The Fred who came to pick up the car was a small man, about Burgess's size. His hair was brown, his face nondescript. His suit was not zoot—it was just the chain that made it look that way. Burgess watched the way he kept twirling it until the little man's eyes caught his and held for an instant. He decided the fat man was pleasant by comparison. After a moment's whispered conversation Fred got into the Cadillac and drove away very law-abidingly.

"How long before we leave?" Burgess asked.

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The fat man lowered the newspaper slightly. "Be an hour before Fred and the boys get back."

Burgess lay down on a creeper and started to scoot under the truck.

"I could blow a dozen holes in you before you go six inches farther," the fat man said quietly.

Burgess sat up again. "The muffler's loose," he explained. "I wanted to make sure it didn't fall off."

"We'll take that chance."

Burgess shrugged. "Mind if I read my paper?" he asked after a moment.

"Be my guest." The fat man tossed him a section. Burgess sat cross-legged on the creeper and studied the front page, looking for a robbery or kidnaping. Nothing. Several aircraft carriers in port; the town crowded with sailors but, when wasn't it? Then he found it: a small item on the local-news page about how the aircraft plants' paydays just happened to fall on the same day the navy paid off and the navy was paying by check this month to close out the fiscal year. Something about a record money shipment to prevent the check-cashing snafu that had paralyzed San Diego the last time everything came on the same day. It began to figure.

"Planning to stay long in Mexico?" Burgess asked.

"Long enough."

"¿Entiendes el idioma del país?"

"Hug?"

"Kind of rough if you don't speak the language," Burgess said.

"Don't worry, we got friends."

Burgess wished he had a few of his own. "How far do you expect me to haul you?" he asked.

"We'll tell you when to stop."

They sat in silence a moment. Burgess schemed desperately. "How about getting some sandwiches while we're waiting?" he asked.

"You got a kitchen in the truck, ain't you?" the fat man said in his roaring whisper.

"Groceries are cheaper across the border. I always stock up in Tijuana."

"Then wait'll we get to Tijuana." The fat man said Teeawanna, making it sound like something in upper New York State. While Burgess sat there, fishing glumly for a new idea, the Cadillac pulled into the garage, very-law-abidingly.

Fred slipped from behind the wheel and began passing poles and fishing gear into the back of Burgess's truck. Two new men were shucking out of suit coats and into sports shirts. They switched snap-brim hats for baseball caps and became sportsmen. One helped Fred and the fat man change while the other passed a satchel from the Cad to the back of the truck.

The fat man reached for his armpit and Burgess saw the gun for the first time as it motioned him to the driver's seat. One of the new men locked the garage door and they drove away slowly. Bur-

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gess studied what he could see of the darkened interior of his camper from a mirror. The barrel of the fat man's automatic glittered and Burgess guessed he'd taken a pillow and planted himself on top of the stove. He couldn't see the other two.

When they reached the freeway, Burgess eased off on the throttle until it backfired. He fumbled for the choke and managed to make the truck backfire twice more before the engine settled down.

Five miles later he picked up a wobbling red light in the mirror. As he was trying to think of something spectacular enough to merit a ticket, the fat man heard the siren and said, "Pull over and go slow." Two prowl cars and a motorcycle went by lickety-split and Burgess silently cursed the moment's indecision that had cost him his chance.

Ten minutes later he saw the prowl cars again, parked on the American side of the gates which delineated the limits of their authority. As Burgess pulled up in line, the fat man slid the curtains shut behind the driver's seat. Burgess rolled the window down and tried to breathe normally.

A deputy sheriff stuck his flashlight in Burgess's face and was making up his mind whether he ought to open up the back when one of the old immigration men yelled, "Hi, Burgess! Going after the big one that got away?"

Burgess was still trying to think up an answer to tip them off without getting his own head blown off when the sheriff's officer made up his mind and waved him on through.

An enormously mustached *celador* in the doorway of the Mexican customs building gave a grave nod and the truck drove under the arch. As they pounded over chuck holes in the asphalted bridge approach, Burgess diddled his toe over the accelerator and achieved another backfire; but the Mexican officials took no note. He sweated out the Rube Goldbergish traffic lights and as they left the Agua Caliente end of town a patch of washboard road achieved what all his backfires had been unable to do. Not that it would do much good, Burgess reflected disgustedly, to have the muffler come loose in a country where police didn't care how much noise trucks made. Then, as the road widened past the bull ring, he wondered if his passengers knew anything about Mexican police. He pulled over and stopped.

"Now what?" the fat man growled.

"You heard it," Burgess said. "You want every cop in the country competing to write us tickets?" He reached for a tool box.

The fat man smashed the barrel of his pistol over Burgess's knuckles. "Just a minute," he said. Burgess waited while the big man pawed through the tools. "All

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right," he said when he was sure there was no weapon.

Burgess crawled under the truck, dragging his tools after him. The muffler was old and nearly rusted through. It had slipped off the end of the exhaust pipe, allowing the truck to roar like an uninhibited hot rod. As he was forcing the muffler back on the pipe, his screwdriver went through a thin spot. Burgess took a deep breath and made a hasty decision. "Ask one of your buddies to look under the sink and get me a big potato," he said to the fat man who was squatting beside the truck.

"What good'll that do?" the fat man asked.

"It'll plug a hole long enough to get out of cop range," Burgess said. He jammed his screwdriver into a ventilator in the floorboard.

In a moment the potato was jammed into the muffler's exit and Burgess resumed driving. He rolled the window nearly shut and leaned forward, trying to breathe the trickle of air which leaked in. They were moving around in the back of the truck, but he didn't turn to see. After a while the movement behind him stopped.

Some time later he heard a noise —as if someone were trying to get up and open a ventilator. Whoever it was apparently changed his mind or lost interest.

There was no noise at all when Burgess pulled up at the sentry box where soldiers guard Rodriguez Dam from an imaginary danger. They waved the truck through and he drove out on the narrow, fenced-in highway which crosses the top. Halfway across, the dam takes a sharp left turn. When Burgess had crossed and driven far enough down the road to be hidden from the soldiers, he pulled up and turned off the lights. He waited a moment, expecting blows or bullets—but nothing happened. Very quietly, he opened the door and slipped out. Then stars wheeled crazily across the sky and in the instant before hard-packed soil ground into his face, Burgess remembered how dizzy he used to get on his mother's piano stool.

There was dried blood on his nose and lip when he woke. Lifting his head, Burgess saw his truck silhouetted in starlight. As he crawled from the ditch he realized that the motor was still idling. He didn't know how weak he was until he tried to stand. Finally he opened the door and, half falling, turned off the idling engine. When the interior had aired, Burgess turned on the inside light and looked for rope. He couldn't find it. He stepped outside and took several deep breaths.

Deep breathing made his head ache even worse and then he vomited. As his mind cleared he saw that the fat man and his companions would not need tying up. He sat on the running board, head between his knees, and waited for

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his head to stop spinning. A car came across the dam. Burgess knew he'd be invisible from where he sat. Before he could get up the car sped by. He sat a while longer, alternately gagging and wheezing, until the chill drove him inside the camper in search of a jacket.

When he turned the inside light on again, the first thing that caught his eye was the satchel. He fumbled at the catches and opened it. Burgess thought he was immune to excitement. Fingering the neat bundles of currency, he understood that one never is. Crisp newness mingled with wrinkled decrepitude. Burgess breathed deeper than ever as he realized there was one chance in a million of ever tracing these bills.

He thought long and hard of the times he'd been suckered. Partner, wife, friends, even the fat man and his pals. Total strangers went out of their way to pour it on to good old Burgess. In San Diego he could return to a hero's welcome. Maybe he'd get an even bigger writeup than the time he'd won the yellowtail derby. And then he could go back to a lonely room behind the garage and try to earn enough money to replace what had been stolen from the partnership. Burgess fingered the bills in the glow of the six-volt bulb and decided it was time to stop being a sucker.

Fred was the lightest. Breathing raggedly, Burgess horsed the chain twirler around into the driver's seat and sat on Fred's lap to drive back to the dam. When he reached it, Burgess stopped and removed the satchel and a blanket. He put the truck in gear and pulled the hand throttle out all the way. As he jumped off the running board Fred opened his eyes and looked blearily at him. Burgess realized with a start that he'd been taking it for granted that he'd already killed four men.

The truck would go right through the concrete railing when it reached the right angle turn in the center. There wasn't much water in the dam this time of year but there was a two-hundred-foot drop and enough water to do the job . . . The truck made a crunching noise and he saw hood and pieces of engine fly overboard in the instant before the lights went out. But the concrete held.

As Burgess turned and walked in the opposite direction, he saw flashlights bobbing down the highway and soldiers running. In a few minutes the place would be swarming with *federales* and the *Cruz Roja* ambulance would be scaring cows and chickens with its siren.

He walked nearly a mile before coming to a shack where some optimist was trying to get a crop without water. On the clothesline hung a pair of ragged bib overalls of the wide Mexican cut that helps Immigration men spot a wetback

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a mile away. Burgess helped himself to the overalls and a few feet of clothesline, holding his breath and waiting for a dog to start barking.

A half mile down the road he rolled his American style pants and the blanket around the satchel. He knotted the clothesline around the bundle, leaving an extra loop to go over his forehead. This transmuted the pack into a *mecapal* and Burgess into one of the Mexican hobos to whom he occasionally gave rides as he sought better fishing and they tramped in the endless search for a better job.

The moon rose over a peak of the eastern sierra. Burgess squinted at his wrist watch from various angles and decided it must be midnight. He wished he hadn't given up smoking. It was a fine time not to be carrying matches. The dizziness came and went. He forced himself to breathe deeply, knowing only deep breathing and time could induce the monoxide to release its stranglehold on his hemoglobin. In spite of the open window and careful breathing he had got a bad dose. Not as bad as the fat man and his pals, though, he thought grimly. He looked over his shoulder and the newly risen moon outlined the shack behind him.

As he stumped along, methodically panting in time to his march, Burgess realized that his conscience was bothering him. The money would be replaced by anonymous stockholders in some insurance company and Burgess could not force himself to sympathize with their loss. The fat man and his pals richly deserved all they got and more. But as he looked back where he'd stolen the only pair of overalls and part of the clothesline, Burgess felt an actual physical sickness. He wanted to leave some money but that would only leave a trail that might bring him all sorts of unpleasantness.

He walked another mile or two before the monotony was broken by a cornfield. A diesel-engined pump was pushing water through an irrigation canal. He decided to chance a drink. When the water hit his stomach he felt sick again. He lay down between the rows of corn and pillowed his head on the bundle. He was still thinking about the overalls as he fell asleep.

A cold, gray dawn had replaced the moon when he woke again, trembling, wondering why he hadn't thought to wrap up in the blanket. He stood and this time was not so dizzy. He decided the worst of the poison had ventilated itself from his bloodstream. He stripped an ear of corn from one of the stalks. Even raw it tasted good. He was stuffing three more ears into his shirt when a voice yelled *"¡Alto!"*

A stocky, mahogany-colored man of about forty-five, with a cottontail rabbit dangling from his belt, was pointing a shotgun at

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him. Just my luck, Burgess thought, to run into a farmer who likes to hunt at daybreak. The *ranchero* walked toward him with the shotgun at port arms. Burgess stood motionless, no longer caring. He hadn't shaved for two days, hadn't eaten for one.

He didn't fully appreciate what the ragged overalls could contribute to his appearance. The *ranchero* looked him up and down and fingered his handlebar mustache with his free hand, trying to look ferocious. It was a losing battle. "Hungry?" he asked in gruff Spanish.

Burgess could almost feel the light bulb glowing above his head like an old-time cartoon as he understood that opportunity was knocking. With his lank dark hair and thin face he could be Mexican as easily as *gringo* except for one thing: accent. Could he fool a native? He pressed his tongue down hard against the back of his teeth and pretended it grew that way. *"Sí, señor. Mucho,"* he said, rolling his eyes.

"Come," the *ranchero* said.

The ranch house was set back from the road, half hidden in a grove of pepper trees. A foot-wide creek flowed through the back yard. Children of all ages swarmed over a wide veranda, almost as thickly as the flies. "Wait here," the *ranchero* said. Burgess waited on the veranda. Boys regarded him with mild curiosity. Girls suddenly had things to do inside the house. In a moment the smaller children were all over him, touching his white skin cautiously, picking at his bundle. The knots seemed fairly tight. He tossed it in a corner and the children promptly lost interest.

A fat, cheerful woman came out on the veranda with a plate. "Cowboys on horseback," she said. She nodded approvingly as Burgess devoured fried eggs drowned in chili sauce, over crisp fried *tortillas*. "Elena!" she yelled.

A tall girl came out with a plate of fried beans and more *tortillas*. She wore faded levis and an off-the-shoulder Mayan blouse. As she strode back inside the house Burgess studied the braids coiled high on her head. His glance switched to the levis and he decided it was, in a way of speaking, nice to see her go.

In a moment she returned with a mug of asphalt-black Mexican coffee. As she handed him the cup their eyes met on the same level. Burgess experienced emotions he thought had been atrophied at seventeen. It required an effort to remember that he was a tongue-tied halfwit. As he drank the coffee he could see her inside the screen door, still studying him.

After breakfast he went with the other men to the cornfield and they shoveled from irrigation ditches, nursing the water on its way through the fields. At two

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they ate—a real dinner—then went back to the cornfield until dark. After a light supper of rolls and hot milk the *ranchero* took Burgess out behind the barn to a haystack. "Drop a cigarette in it and I'll blow your head off," he said by way of good night.

Burgess intended to be on his way as soon as things quieted down and the dogs went to sleep. He lay down for a few minutes. Immediately, it seemed, a boy was shaking him, saying it was time for breakfast. After the boy left he burrowed into the hay, silently thankful that it was a new stack, and buried the satchel.

After breakfast a truck bore them a kilometer down the road. Burgess and the other men spent the morning tying up grapevines in newly strung wire. That afternoon the *ranchero* got to looking at his muddy shoes. The baseball cap Burgess wore on fishing trips wasn't Mexican either. He'd been wearing it as much as he could. The crew cut was too conspicuous in a longhair country.

The *ranchero* noticed the way he tried to keep his hat on and drew an original conclusion. "The *gringos* caught you," he said with a grin.

He had it down pat. American shoes plus American hat plus American crewcut equals wetback. Caught, clipped, deloused, deported. Burgess stuck his tongue down, grinned sheepishly, and mumbled, *"Sí, señor."* That afternoon his shoes fell apart and the ranchero gave him a pair of bullhide *guaraches.*

Burgess hadn't seen Elena since that first morning, but he'd felt her presence behind the screen door at every meal. Once he'd caught a glimpse of a bareback amazon, pistol in each hand, riding down a rabbit.

In the evening he begged a sliver of soap and went downstream from the house. As he was washing his shirt in the miniature creek he felt a presence behind him. The tall girl in levis was leaning against a pepper tree, watching him. She had on the lacy, off-the-shoulder blouse again. Ribbon-twined braids hung over what held up the blouse. He stood silent, twisting the baseball cap in his hands.

"How do you call yourself?" Elena asked.

"Juan," he answered, saying the first name that came to mind.

"And from where do you come?"

Burgess thought a moment. *Some place far away and easy to pronounce.* "I am of Campeche," he finally said.

"Took you long enough to make up your mind," the girl said in unaccented English.

Burgess stood silent, hoping he looked as stupid as he felt. "Since you don't understand English it doesn't matter," she said. "But a couple of very hard-looking char-

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acters and an interpreter stopped by the house this afternoon. They're looking for an American."

Burgess kept his head down. *"Perdon, señorita. No comprendo,"* he said.

"No, of course you don't understand," she continued in English. She spun and walked up the creek bank, high-heeled boots leaving neat prints in the mud. "You know," she said as she reached the top, "if you'd get a shave and get rid of those awful overalls you'd be kind of cute."

Burgess shrugged and went back to rinsing his shirt.

But that night after the last dog had gone to sleep he extracted his bundle from the haystack. Walking carefully heel and toe, he eased by the big house and down the tree-lined path to the highway. Just as he was stepping onto the asphalt he heard a noise behind the trees.

"Aren't you even going to say goodbye?" Elena asked.

He stood still, wondering what answer would be appropriate. She stepped from the shadow and he saw she was leading a horse. A bag of water draped from the saddle horn. She handed him a straw hat. "I know I have a hole in my head," she said calmly, "but you looked so unhappy. One of these days I'll have to get into town and buy a paper. You did kill someone, didn't you?" she asked in that same calm voice.

He nodded dumbly.

"I'm sure she deserved it," the tall girl said. "Most of us do."

"But I—"

"Not now," she said. "Send me a long letter from South America. Here, better take this." She handed him a pearl-handled revolver. "Ammo's in the saddlebag."

Burgess took the reins in his hand and climbed aboard gingerly. He looked down at her, wondering if he should sweep her up, Lochinvar-like, but she was as tall as he and did not seem susceptible to such tactics. "I'll remember this," he said lamely.

"I was counting on that," she said. She turned and disappeared.

By daybreak Burgess had ridden south, bypassing Tecate, and was on the dirt road to Ojos Negros. The natural routes of escape from Tijuana are two: the highways which lead inland to Mexicali and south to the sea at Ensenada. They would be looking inland where his trail had last pointed. If he was lucky the horse trail to Ojos Negros would not be patrolled. Through it he could reach Ensenada and a boat.

Burgess had been over the road once before, five years ago, following a bum steer someone had given him about the fishing in rock-filled Laguna Hanson. There would be no water until he arrived at the lake. He crossed one leg over the saddle horn and tried for the thousandth time to find a

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comfortable position. He studied the animal's cream-colored mane and bobbing ears, wondering how many hours it could lope along without water. He wished annoyedly that it had an engine so he could understand it. Should he rest during the day and ride only at night? Or would it be best to push on nonstop until he reached water?

When the sun reached what Burgess estimated as ten o'clock they passed a minuscule box cañon. Burgess turned in. There were a few tufts of grass but no water. He decided the straight-sided cañon would afford shade and the horse could graze, if not drink. He loosened the cinch and removed the waterbag. After a moment's debate he uncorked the bag and offered it to the horse. To his surprise, the horse tilted its head and waited for him to pour a drink into its mouth.

The saddlebags contained a small sack of sandy gray-yellow powder, several cans of tomatoes, and a piece of black, stringy material which Burgess recognized as dried meat. After hacking at a can of tomatoes with the inadequate can opener on his boy scout knife, it occurred to Burgess to look in the other saddlebag where, wrapped in a large bandanna, he found a handful of ammunition and a can opener. He sampled the yellow powder with his finger and stirred some of it into the tomato liquor. He admired the tall girl's practicality in providing rations which would not spoil. *Pinolé*—cornmeal parched before grinding—was "K" ration to the army which nearly licked Cortez. He spread out the blanket and slept.

It was late afternoon before the sun wheeled around to the open end of the box cañon and woke Burgess from a dream of blast furnaces and falling lava. He hadn't thought to tie or hobble the horse, so, of course, it was gone. Pains darted through Burgess as he stood. He still had the waterbag. He decided he could walk more comfortably and not drink as much water.

The moon stayed with him until midnight and the trail was not too difficult. He had been climbing steadily and as the trail began winding he encountered an occasional stunted pine. After the moon set it wasn't so easy. He kept stumbling over rocks as he wandered from the trail and after he had worked his way very cautiously around two buzzing rattlers, Burgess decided to quit while he was ahead. He spent the rest of the night shivering in the blanket. With the first light of dawn he was up again, plodding toward the lake.

At daylight he stopped on the summit of a hill. He cut off a chunk of dried meat and began chewing it. He could see several miles of trail in both directions.

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He decided it was time for an inventory. Leisurely, Burgess unwrapped the satchel and began laying out piles of fives, tens, twenties, fifties, and an occasional bundle of hundreds. The piece of jerked beef was getting so big he could hardly chew it.

A small black spot at the head of a cloud of dust appeared on the lower stretch of trail as Burgess's count reached three hundred thirty-six thousand. He hastily rewound his blanket around the satchel. Fifteen minutes after he had erased his tally marks from the dust and started walking, an incredibly dilapidated panel delivery, with California plates wired on above the battered Mexican license, whined to a stop beside him. The driver motioned him inside but he had to stand, hat in hand, while the driver's wife got out so that the seat could be tilted forward. The back doors were padlocked.

The rear windows of the truck were obscured by a row of dresses and men's work clothes hanging from pipes which ran down each side. After the glare on the road Burgess was blind. A smell and a cackling warned him of a crate of chickens the *falluquero* had picked up during his bartering expedition. He sat on the coop, wondering where the peddler would turn them into cash for more dresses. Then he made the mistake of putting his hand down.

Most people have a natural horror of reptiles. Burgess did. When he put his hand down in the darkness and felt a smooth head and heard a grating hiss, he forgot all about holding his tongue down. He never remembered exactly what he said, but it was loud and it was in English. The *falluquero* and his wife turned to look at him. As Burgess's eyes adjusted, he saw the turtle which lay bottom side up, awaiting some *ranchero* with a taste for soup.

"Are you American?" the woman asked in passable English.

"¿Mande usted?"

She repeated the question in Spanish.

"No, señora, I come from Jalisco," Burgess said, holding his tongue down. "I learned those words from the American *mayordomo* when we did not dig celery fast enough." The woman looked at him thoughtfully, but she said nothing more. An hour later, when Burgess was looking for rocks to block wheels and fix the first flat of the day, he noticed her still looking at him with that thoughtful expression. He pulled the straw hat down over his ears and wondered just how much further he could go with the feeble-minded act.

Twenty minutes later he found out. The starter wouldn't kick over and he had to push. When the truck did start it kept right on going down the hill and Burgess stood there, suckered by the oldest trick in the world, watching his

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bundle go rolling off down the switchback mountain road.

They talk of the speed of fear and the strength of despair. Has anyone dwelt sufficiently on the strength of fury when a man knows he's just been taken? There is a special angel for madmen and drunkards. Burgess was mad. In twenty-foot leaps he went straight down the side of the mountain. When the decrepit truck came creeping down to the next hairpin curve, grinding against compression, the ratty mustached *falluquero* pumping on the brakes, Burgess saw that the right-hand seat was empty. He flipped open the door and jumped in. The driver looked at him surprisedly in the instant before Burgess delivered his all, right over the man's ear. It took quick and fancy doing, but he got the door open, pushed the driver out, and kept one hand on the wheel all the time.

The woman was in back, picking at the knots on the bundle. "Up front or I'll jump out and let you roll!" Burgess roared, not caring about accents. She took a quick look through the windshield and scrambled into the seat beside him. Then he cocked a fist and yelled "Out!" She didn't hesitate to leap from the crawling truck.

Burgess surveyed his situation unhappily. He had a truck and didn't know what to do with it. He thought of dumping it over the precipice, but it wasn't that simple. Any traffic from behind would see the *falluquero* and his woman first. Burgess had to race them to Ensenada.

He wondered if they knew what was in the bundle or if they'd just hooked it on general principles—a blanket and another pair of pants to trade off somewhere. He wondered if the *falluquero* and his woman would make it without water. Mexican law would take a dim view of his tactics and the only fate worse than death that Burgess could think of was a stretch in a local jail. Then he calmed down and took stock. The gas gauge wasn't working. He hoped the peddler had filled up in Tecate. Suddenly the engine quit.

He got out and thumped knuckles against the tank. It sounded full. In a moment he located the loose wire which had dropped from the end of the coil. Looking over his shoulder to see if the *falluquero* was coming, he slammed the hood shut. Then, suddenly visualizing a lifetime of looking over his shoulder, Burgess reached a decision.

He drove another mile before the trail widened enough to turn around. Coming down the mountainside, he saw the peddler and his woman trudging back toward Tecate. They made unfriendly gestures as he passed and the man, still rubbing his ear with one hand, threw a rock which broke the windshield on the off side and, in

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Burgess's estimate, improved ventilation. He saw their dwindling figures in the mirror long after he had passed.

Down on the valley floor it was even hotter. Burgess could barely see the twin dots, forlornly descending into shimmering waves of heat as he stopped. He felt slightly sorry for them, so he left the tire pump leaning against one wheel. Then he shouldered his bundle, sure of several hours head start. And if they were as tired as he hoped, they might decide on a night's sleep before pumping up four flat tires.

It was late afternoon when he reached the cañon where he'd lost Elena's horse. He tramped an extra half mile of dusty footprints before jumping to rocky ground and retracing his steps. A few hours of rest, Burgess decided, and he could walk to the border before daybreak. Across the barbed wire were paved roads where he could get a ride to the nearest police station. They wouldn't really believe his amnesia story—but the insurance company would be too glad to get the money back.

He woke to the sound of neighing. Two horses were grazing on the sparse grass at the head of the little cañon. Elena knelt beside him. "The horse came home too soon," she said. "I was worried, so I trailed you."

Burgess looked at her sweaty, dust-caked face. The magic was still there. "Do you like to fish?" he asked.

"Love it. Why?"

And Burgess knew he had reached the right decision.

ONCE AGAIN . . .

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Dashiell Hammett's "unknown" short stories of the early 1920s paved the way to his master works—THE MALTESE FALCON, THE GLASS KEY, THE THIN MAN. *These early short stories were often ironic or sardonic studies of the people who make up the undercrust of American society—the little people who are not the kind and gentle folk of our more sentimental popular songs; the little people who, given wider scope and opportunity and a bit more luck if not brains, could easily emerge as the "brutal, grasping heels" that came to life so vividly in Hammett's larger canvases. A man, for example, like Tom Doody . . .*

WAGES OF CRIME

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

"COME ALONG WITHOUT ANY FUSS and there won't be no trouble," said the tall man with the protruding lower lip.

"And remember, anything you say will—" the fat man under the stiff straw hat warned, the rest of the prescribed caution dying somewhere within the folds of his burly neck.

A frown of perplexed interrogation reduced the none too ample area between Tom Doody's eyebrows and the roots of his hair. He cleared his throat uneasily and asked, "But what's it for?"

The protruding lower lip overlapped the upper in a smile that tempered derision with indulgence. "You ought to be able to guess—but it ain't a secret. You're arrested for stealing sixty-five thousand dollars from the National Marine Bank. We found the dough where you hid it, and now we got you."

"That's what," the fat man corroborated.

Tom Doody leaned across the plain table in the visitors' room and bent his beady eyes on the tired, middle-aged eyes of the woman from the *Morning Bulletin*.

"Miss Envers, I have served three and a half years here and I've got nearly ten more to do, taking in account what I expect to get off for good behavior. A long time, I guess you think; but I'm telling you that I don't regret a minute of it." He paused to let this startling assertion sink in, and then leaned forward again over hands that lay flat, palms down, fingers spread, on the top of the table.

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"I came in here, Miss Envers, a safe-burglar that had been caught for the first and only time in fifteen years of crime. I am going out of here completely reformed, and with only one aim in my life; and that's to do all I can to keep other people from following in my footsteps. I'm studying, and the chaplain is helping me, so that when I get out I can talk and write so as to get my message across. I used to be pretty good at reciting and making speeches when I was a kid in school and I guess it'll come back to me all right. I'm going from one end of the country to the other, if I have to ride freights, telling of my experiences as a criminal, and the light that busted —burst on me here in prison. I know what it is, and lots of people that maybe wouldn't listen to a preacher or anybody else will pay attention to me. They'll know that I know what I am talking about, that I've been through it, that I'm the man who robbed the National Marine Bank and lots of others."

"You were very nearly acquitted, weren't you?" Evelyn Envers asked.

"Yes, nearly," the convict said, "and as truly as I'm sitting here, Miss Envers, I thank God that I was convicted!"

He stopped and tried to read surprise in the faded gray eyes across the table. Then he went on. "But for that—the chance for self-knowledge and thought that this place has gave—has given me—I might have gone on and on, might never have come to an understanding of what it means to be a Christian and know the difference between right and wrong. Here in prison I found for the first time in my life, liberty—yes, liberty!—freedom from the bonds of vice and crime and self-destruction!" With this paradox he rested.

"Have you made any other plans for your career after leaving here?" the woman asked.

"No. That's too far ahead. But I am going to spend the rest of my life spreading the truth about crime as I know it, if I have to sleep in gutters and live on stale bread!"

"He's a fraud, of course," Evelyn Envers told her typewriter as she slid a sheet of paper into it, "but he'll make as good a story as anything else."

So she wrote a column about Tom Doody and his high resolves, and because the thought behind his reformation was so evident to her she took special pains with the story, gilding the shabbier of his mouthings and garnishing the man himself with no inconsiderable appeal.

For several days after the story's appearance letters came to the *Morning Bulletin* Readers' Forum, commenting on Tom Doody and tendering suggestions of various sorts.

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The Rev. Randall Gordon Rand made Tom Doody the subject of one of his informal Sunday talks.

And then John J. Kelleher, 1322 Britton Street, was crushed to death by a furniture van after pushing little Fern Bier, five-year-old daughter of Louis Bier, 1304 Britton Street, to safety; and it developed that Kelleher had been convicted of burglary several years before, and was out on parole at the time of the accident.

Evelyn Envers wrote a column about Kelleher and his dark-eyed little wife, and with doubtful relevance brought Tom Doody into the last paragraph. The *Chronicle* and the *Intelligencer* printed editorials in which Kelleher's death was adduced as demonstrative of the parole system's merit.

On the afternoon before the next regular meeting of the State Parole Board the football team of the state university—three members of the board were ardent alumni—turned a defeat into victory in the last quarter.

Tom Doody was paroled.

From his room on the third floor of the Chapham Hotel, Tom Doody could see one of the posters. Red and black letters across a fifteen-by-thirty field of glaring white gave notice that Tom Doody, a reformed safe-burglar of considerable renown, would talk at the Lyric Theater each night for one week on the wages of sin.

Tom Doody tilted his chair forward, rested his elbows on the sill, and studied the poster with fond eyes. That billboard was all right—though he had thought perhaps his picture would be on it. But Fincher had displayed no enthusiasm when a suggestion to that effect had been made, and whatever Fincher said went. Fincher was all right. There was the contract Fincher had given him—a good hundred dollars more a week than he had really expected. And then there was that young fellow Fincher had hired to put Tom Doody's lecture in shape. There was no doubt that the lecture was all right now.

The lecture began with his childhood in the bosom of a loving family, carried him through the usual dance-hall and pool-room introductions to gay society, and then rose in a crescendo of vague but nevertheless increasingly vicious crimes to a smashing climax with the burglary of the National Marine Bank's $65,000, the resultant arrest and conviction, and the new life that had dawned as he bent one day over his machine in the prison jute-mill. Then a tapering off with a picture of the criminal's inherent misery and the glory of standing four-square with the world. But the red meat of it was the thousand and one nights of crime—that was what the audience would come to hear.

The young fellow who had been hired to mold and polish the

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Doody epic had wanted concrete facts—names and dates and amounts—about the earlier crimes; but Tom Doody had drawn the line there, protesting that such a course would lay him open to arrest for felonies with which the police had heretofore been unable to connect him, and Fincher had agreed with him.

The truth of it was that there were no crimes prior to the National Marine Bank burglary—that unexpected conviction was the only picturesque spot in Tom Doody's life. But he knew too much to tell Fincher that. At the time of his arrest the newspapers and the police—who, for quite perceptible reasons, pretend to see in every apprehended criminal an enormously adept and industrious fellow—had brought to light hundreds of burglaries, and even a murder or two, in which this Tom Doody might have been implicated. He felt that these fanciful accusations had helped expedite his conviction, but now the fanfare was to be of value to him—as witness the figure on his contract. As a burglar with but a single crime to his credit he would have been a poor attraction on the platform, but with the sable and crimson laurels the police and the press had hung upon him, that was another matter.

For at least a year these black and red and white posters would accompany him wherever he went. His contract covered that period, and perhaps he could renew it for many years. Why not? The lecture was all right, and he knew he could deliver it creditably. He had rehearsed assiduously and Fincher had seemed pleased with his address. Of course he'd probably be a little nervous tomorrow night, when he faced an audience for the first time, but that would pass and he would soon feel at home in this new game. There was money in it—the ticket sales had been large, so Fincher said. Perhaps after a while—

The door opened violently and Fincher came into the room—an apoplectic Fincher, altogether unlike the usual smiling, mellow manager of Fincher's International Lecture Bureau.

"What's up?" Tom Doody asked, consciously keeping his eyes from darting furtively toward the door.

"What's up?" Fincher repeated the words, but his voice was a bellow. "What's up?" He brandished a rolled newspaper shillalahwise in Tom Doody's face. "I'll show you what's up!" He seemed to be lashing himself into more vehement fury with reiterations of the ex-convict's query, as lions were once said to do with their tails.

He straightened out the newspaper, smoothed a few square inches of its surface, and thrust it at Tom Doody's nose, with one lusty forefinger laid like an indicator on the center of the sheet.

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Tom Doody leaned back until his eyes were far enough away to focus upon the print around his manager's finger.

. . . by the police, Tom Doody, who was paroled several days ago after serving nearly four years for the theft of $65,000 from the National Marine Bank, has been completely exonerated of that crime by the deathbed confession of Walter Beadle, who . . .,

"That's what's up!" Fincher shouted, when Tom Doody had shifted his abject eyes from the paper to the floor. "Now I want that five hundred dollars I advanced to you!"

Tom Doody went through his pockets with alacrity that poorly masked his despair, and brought out some bills and a handful of silver. Fincher grabbed the money from the ex-convict's hands and counted it rapidly.

"Two hundred and thirty-one dollars and forty cents," he announced. "Where's the rest?"

Tom Doody tried to say something but only muttered.

"Mumbling won't do any good," Fincher snarled. "I want my five hundred dollars. Where is it?"

"That's all I've got," Tom Doody whined. "I spent the rest, but I'll pay every cent of it back if you'll only give me time."

"I'll give you time, you dirty crook, I'll give you time!" Fincher stamped to the telephone. "I'll give you till the police get here, and if you don't come across I'm going to swear out a warrant for obtaining money under false pretenses!"

NEXT MONTH . . .

PATRICK QUENTIN's *Death and the Rising Star*

AGATHA CHRISTIE's *Village Tragedy*

L. A. G. STRONG's *The Birdwatcher*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**PHYLLIS BENTLEY**
TITLE:	***Miss Phipps Goes to School***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Miss Phipps, spinster mystery writer
LOCALE:	A boys' boarding school in England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Curious little incidents were happening at Star Isle College—as if a poltergeist were at work. Were they merely boyish pranks? Or was there a more sinister force at large?*

DIDDLE DIDDLE DUMPLING, MY son John," sang Mary Tarrant happily, "went to bed with one shoe on."

Young Master John Tarrant, agreeably clad in his own charming birthday suit and held firmly round the waist by his mother's loving hands, laughed and crowed and stamped gleefully about her knee. Miss Phipps watched smiling from a nearby chair.

"My darling," whispered Mary fondly, kissing him. "Well, I guess I'd better go and make that coffee. Mrs. Brooke did say she'd call for you at eleven, didn't she, Miss Phipps?" She laid her son down on her lap and began what appeared to the detective novelist the impossible task of inserting his waving arms and legs into various small garments.

"Yes, at eleven," agreed Miss Phipps, looking at her watch. "Let's hope she'll be late. I don't want to tear myself away from your offspring's antics."

"Yes, isn't he precious? Such a piece of luck, your being invited to lecture at Star Isle College, Miss Phipps," said Mary. "I was so anxious for you to see the baby as he is now. He changes almost every week, you know."

"My dear, I only accepted the engagement because it gave me the chance of visiting you in Brittlesea *en route*," said Miss Phipps truthfully. "Boys' boarding schools,

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however well-known and reputable, are not really in my line."

"But Star Isle is really a very fine school," said Mary, clasping a safety pin. "John says so. The buildings have all been modernized, and they have a beautiful beach. The new Headmaster, Dr. Brooke, is very progressive and energetic, and his wife is young and intelligent, and she coaches the boys in drama. And the Brookes have a baby about the same age as Johnny," concluded Mary triumphantly, offering this last fact as a supreme token of the Brookes' desirability.

It occurred to Miss Phipps to wonder whether Detective-Inspector Tarrant had ever been over to Star Isle College in his professional capacity, and if so, why; but knowing his discretion on all matters connected with his work, she forebore to put the question, and just then the doorbell rang. Mary placed the baby on the settee, wedging him in with cushions, then went to answer it. Miss Phipps, shy but determined, crossed over to the settee and did a little baby worship on her own, and was rewarded by having one finger tightly clasped in a delicious miniature fist. She was thus in a good position to observe the look which young Mrs. Brooke turned on the baby when she entered the room. This look startled, even shocked Miss Phipps, for it was one of fear and anguish.

Introductions were performed. Mrs. Brooke's hand trembled in Miss Phipps's clasp.

"I'll just slip out and fetch the coffee," said Mary.

"No! No, thank you," said Mrs. Brooke hastily. "It's most kind of you, Mrs. Tarrant, but I'm afraid I really can't stay. The ferry across to the island, you know, has only limited service on Saturday mornings. We shall just have time to catch the 11:30 boat if we leave now."

"But couldn't you stay and catch the next boat?" urged Mary.

"I'm afraid it's impossible," said Mrs. Brooke.

She spoke with so much authority and decision that there was nothing to do but obey, although Mary was upset by the rejection of her hospitality and Miss Phipps was grieved on Mary's account. Miss Phipps's overnight bag was hastily thrown into the back of Mrs. Brooke's car, Miss Phipps herself was hustled into her coat and almost thrust into the front seat, farewells were curtailed, Mrs. Brooke took the wheel, and they were off for Star Isle.

During the next twenty minutes Miss Phipps, observing her companion with the shrewd eye of a novelist and listening with a novelist's ear, discovered that Mrs. Brooke was tall, slender, dark, neat, dressed in good tweeds, intelligent, a University graduate, and a skillful driver. But she wore an

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angry frown down the center of her forehead, and snatched every advantage on the road which offered itself. Her story about the ferry was clearly not a mere snobbish excuse to refuse Marys' hospitality; she was obviously motivated by some painful urgency.

The ferryboat—no doubt a landing-craft from wartime days, reflected Miss Phipps—was at the pier with its blunt bows open and lowered when they arrived. Mrs. Brooke jumped the queue of waiting cars and drove up to the boat, at which the attendant seaman and policeman gaped in astonishment. She made no comment on her action to the sailor who collected her ticket, although he gazed at her reproachfully. As the ferry waddled slowly along the winding course marked out by numerous posts and buoys, she tapped her foot impatiently.

"A sandy coast?" said Miss Phipps politely, merely making conversation.

"Yes—with quicksands here and there. Very treacherous."

"Is it like that all around the island?"

"Oh, no! To the south, by the College, we have cliffs and bays."

"Is it far from the harbor to the College?"

"About four miles," said Mrs. Brooke. Her foot kept tapping, and her hands clenched themselves about the wheel of the car.

Miss Phipps was so affected by this impatience that whereas ordinarily she would have much enjoyed the process of disembarkation—the throwing and securing of lines, the dignified lowering of the stern, the parade of foot passengers along a gangway surrendering tickets, the laying of planks for the car's wheels, and the bumpy ticklish drive from ship to shore, solemnly superintended by an elderly policeman—today she found it almost unbearably slow and tedious. Once they were on land, however, they flew along the russet autumn lanes, rushed through the old stone gateway of the College, and drew up sharply with a squeal of brakes in the gravel circle in front of the Headmaster's residence. Mrs. Brooke leaped out and ran up the shallow steps to a handsome cream perambulator with a fringed awning, which stood on the terrace beside the door. Bending over this she lifted out a sleeping infant, then returned to Miss Phipps with the baby in her arms and the frown quite gone from her face, which now looked very young and yearning.

"Will you come in? They'll fetch your bag later," she said, and led her guest into a large, pleasant sitting room with French windows on two sides, one set overlooking the terrace with the baby carriage, the other, on the opposite wall, having an agreeable view of beach, cliff, and sea to the right, with the

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long row of gray College buildings on the left.

Miss Phipps sat down, feeling a trifle ruffled. A middle-aged woman with bluish hair, a rather superior expression, and dressed in white, was arranging a large tray of glasses and sherry on a table nearby; it appeared that a rush of masters, invited to meet the great lecturer, was imminent. The older woman was introduced to Miss Phipps as Miss Bellivant, the College housekeeper.

"I've read one or two of your books, Miss Phipps," said Miss Bellivant in a condescending tone. "Just as light reading, at night."

"I hope you enjoyed them," said Miss Phipps, commending herself for keeping her temper.

"Oh, yes, quite. Other people enjoy them too—I can't seem to keep them on my shelves," said the housekeeper in a rather puzzled fashion. "They keep disappearing."

"I do beg your pardon, Miss Phipps," said Mrs. Brooke when Miss Bellivant had gone, and still rocking her sleeping child gently in her arms, "for rushing you along like this. It was unforgivable. And that sweet Mrs. Tarrant. I'm afraid I was rude to her—I am most truly sorry. But you see—I was so anxious about Tommy."

"Why?" said Miss Phipps bluntly.

"Leaving him alone," said Mrs. Brooke, hanging her head.

"But surely you have plenty of staff here," objected Miss Phipps, "to keep an eye on him?"

"Yes, in a way. But—oh, well, a young mother, you know," said Mrs. Brooke, laughing falsely. "One gets these fancies."

"What fancies?" said Miss Phipps. Mrs. Brooke was silent. "What kind of fancies?" pressed Miss Phipps. "You're too intelligent, too well-educated, to indulge in groundless fancies, I'm sure," she continued. "You feared some danger for the child?"

"It was so strange," began Mrs. Brooke hesitantly. "Such a mysterious little incident." She stopped. "I'm ashamed to trouble you with it."

"What did your husband say when you told him of the incident?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"Henry? He laughed. But I think he was worried. He's rather worried about a good many things just now," said Mrs. Brooke.

There were occasions when Miss Phipps, usually the mildest and most modest of women, found it useful to play the celebrated novelist. She did so now.

"My dear," she said in the commanding resonant tone which she used to impress fans at literary cocktail parties, "you had better tell me all about it. I have had a good deal of experience in solving these small mysteries, both as a detective novelist and as an occasional assistant to the police. Confide

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in me. You may trust in my discretion absolutely."

"Well," said Mrs. Brooke, still hesitating; then she plunged: "It was like this. It sounds so silly, but really it was strange. Last Sunday morning I'd just put the baby in his pram on the terrace. I was upstairs in our bedroom, putting on my hat and coat, meaning to slip late into Chapel. I heard the baby begin to cry. I looked out and saw that he had thrown his rattle out of his pram."

"They often do that," said Miss Phipps, nodding her head wisely. "Throw things away and then want the discarded objects back again. Just like adults."

"So I ran downstairs and out to the terrace," Mrs. Brooke went on, "and the rattle was in his pram."

"*In* his pram?" exclaimed Miss Phipps stupidly.

Mrs. Brooke nodded. "Lying on the coverlet."

"But somebody must have put it there!"

"Agreed. But who? All the boys, the teaching staff, the secretarial staff, Miss Bellivant, and several of the masters' wives—everybody, in fact—were in Chapel. We have our own College chapel, you know. We had the Bishop of Southshire over here that morning, as a matter of fact, and he's a very good preacher, so everybody was there."

"One of the domestic staff?"

"We have no domestic staff of our own; nowadays all that work is done by the College domestic staff."

"Then one of them?"

"Miss Phipps," said Mrs. Brooke very earnestly, "believe me, it was *nobody*. I've asked *everybody*. After all, it was kind action; nobody need be ashamed to own up to it, need they? But nobody admits to having put the rattle back in the pram."

"My dear," said Miss Phipps in her most soothing tone, "don't be vexed with me when I tell you I really think you are making a mountain out of a molehill. The postman passed by, perhaps—oh, no, not on a Sunday. The milkman—no, not by your private front-entrance. Well, somebody," concluded Miss Phipps pettishly. "It's a very small matter, after all."

"Not when taken in conjunction with other small matters which have been happening here," said Mrs. Brooke. "There seems a jinx on the school this term. And Henry cares so much, you know. Everything was going so well—till now."

"What other small matters?" demanded Miss Phipps.

"Here we are, my dear," said Henry Brooke, entering the room with a flock of masters behind him.

He was one of the new type of Headmasters, Miss Phipps observed with interest—short, slight, fair, utterly unpompous, but with a dynamic energy informing his

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whole personality. His gray eyes were shrewd and bright.

"Ah, Miss Phipps," said he, shaking hands.

His tone was courteous but noncommittal; it was clear to Miss Phipps that his judgment on his visiting lecturer was as yet suspended.

"And why not?" thought Miss Phipps honestly. "He knows nothing of me as yet."

She exerted herself to make intelligent conversation.

"My dear boy," said old Mr. Pryce in mild, sad, mellifluous tones. "My dear Deighton, if you would only understand that I am not reproaching you in the least for upsetting the pile of reports. It's the easiest thing in the world to do, especially as my desk stands under the common-room window. I entirely acquit you of any desire to wound or annoy me."

"But, Mr. Pryce," began young Mr. Deighton, who was short and gingery, wore a pullover stained with chemicals, and spoke with a decidedly less well modulated accent, "I give you my word—"

"I am well aware," Mr. Pryce flowed on, his long gray mustaches quivering with wounded feeling, "that to young scientific men like yourself, classics masters are mere useless survivals, a sort of dinosaur. I have no quarrel with that attitude. I understand well how it can be so. I do not complain. Also, I appreciate your desire for fresh air. Young people like open windows; they do not suffer from draughts as we old fogeys are apt to do. In opening the common-room window, you dislodged the pile of my half-term house reports, which, no doubt in complete conformity with some law of dynamics familiar to you, fell to the ground in hideous confusion. They had been carefully alphabeticized in order of the boys' names; this order was destroyed by the fall and some forty minutes were required to restore it. But what of that? Such an accident might happen to anyone," said Mr. Pryce with noble acceptance. "I do not claim exemption from misfortune. But—"

"Another glass of sherry, Pryce?" put in Henry Brooke, proffering the decanter.

"Thank you, Headmaster. I am aware that you are trying to divert me from a painful subject," said Mr. Pryce. "But your sherry is good and your thought a kind one, tee-hee!" He laughed gently and held out his glass, his innocent old eyes beaming. "So I accept with gratitude."

"He's rather a pet, after all," thought Miss Phipps, who from her place beside Mrs. Brooke on the settee was watching the uncomfortable little scene.

"But, Mr. Pryce, I assure you I did *not* upset your pile of reports," said young Deighton in a tone of

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greatly suppressed exasperation. "I never went near your desk. And I didn't open the window."

"It was open when I entered the common-room," said Mr. Pryce with a mild, meditative air. "It is your lack of trust in my good fellowship which grieves me, Deighton. Have I proved myself so harsh a colleague that you cannot confess to me a small peccadillo, an accidental injury? That wounds me, my dear boy, wounds me deeply. I had not thought that my younger colleagues held me in such dread."

"Mr. Pryce, I don't hold you in any dread. I feel for you only respect and affection!" shouted young Deighton. "But I didn't knock over your reports!"

"Well—let us dismiss the matter. Let us forget it," said Mr. Pryce sadly. His sadness was genuine, Miss Phipps noted; the gleam in his old eyes faded, his mustaches drooped. "I raise my glass to you, Deighton. I drink to you and Science."

"Mr. Pryce," began Deighton in a high shrill voice, which reminded Miss Phipps of steam escaping from an overcharged boiler, "I—"

Henry Brooke laid a hand on his arm, and the young man turned away, crimson with rage.

"But wouldn't it be better *not* to forget the incident? To probe it to the core?" said Miss Phipps boldly, rising and going toward the group.

On all their faces, as they turned to her, she read that male expression of distaste which means "Women!" Nevertheless, she persevered. She liked kind old Pryce, able Brooke, and struggling young Deighton; she wished them all well, and in her opinion the truth is the best gift one can wish for anyone.

"Such little mysteries, at first sight inexplicable, are my stock in trade as a detective story writer," she went on blandly. "Could I have the details of this one, please?"

"My dear madam," said old Mr. Pryce, bowing courteously, "I shall of course be most happy to serve you in any way. Without troubling you with the details of our routine, let me give you the essential facts. Yesterday morning during a free period just after break, I was working on a pile of reports in the common-room. I was alone in the room. The window was shut. I left the room, for a few moments only, to go out to ring a certain bell. As I went out, I encountered Mr. Deighton coming in. As I returned, I met Mr. Deighton coming along the passage from the common-room, which is, so to say, situated in a cul-de-sac. I entered the common-room and found my reports scattered over the floor, and the window slightly open."

"Perhaps the draught from the window scattered the reports?" suggested Miss Phipps.

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"A substantial paperweight rested on them," said Mr. Pryce with his air of serious musing.

"And now you, Mr. Deighton," said Miss Phipps in a friendly tone.

"Well—I don't know anything about his reports, though I don't suppose you'll believe it," snapped Deighton in his brash, aggressive manner. "I went into the common-room to fetch a dictionary from the shelves. It took me a minute or two to find it. I found it and left with it in my hand. I met Mr. Pryce in the corridor. That's all."

"Were the reports on the floor when you left the room?"

"No. Emphatically, no."

"Was the window open?"

"I don't know. I think not, but I couldn't swear to it. At any rate, I never went near the window."

"Perhaps you banged the door, and the vibration upset the reports?"

"I don't bang doors, even if I didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge," cried Deighton angrily. "And on my word of honor I never touched Mr. Pryce's reports."

"An interesting little problem," said Miss Phipps in her blandest tone. Apart from the possibility that one of the two men was mistaken, she had not the faintest idea of any solution, but she did not intend to let the staff of Star Isle College know this. "It is these everyday *minutiæ* which offer the greatest scope for keen ratiocination," she continued.

The Headmaster gave her a shrewd look.

"And what would you suggest," he began in a quizzical tone, when suddenly to Miss Phipps's relief the sound of an immense bell clanged long and loud through the air. "Ah, lunch. On Saturdays we lunch in hall with the boys," said the Headmaster. "Are you coming, Ella?"

His wife shook her head. "I'll stay with the baby," she said nervously.

The Headmaster was not pleased, but accepted her refusal with an urbane little bow, then ushered Miss Phipps out of the seaview windows. He took her at a smart pace along a path, under an archway, up some steps, across a huge kitchen—where Miss Bellivant amid rows of steel cookers and enameled refrigerators directed a scurrying crowd of white-coated girls—and through a pair of swing doors.

"Short cut," he said briskly as they emerged on a dais by a long refectory table.

Miss Phipps nodded, too breathless to speak. The other masters streamed in their wake. Evidently punctuality was *de rigueur* at Star Isle College.

In the large dining hall, however, there was a long pause. Something, thought Miss Phipps, glancing down from the dais to the long rows of boys standing silent

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and attentive by the tables on which dishes already steamed, seemed to have gone wrong. The other masters did not look in the direction of Dr. Brooke, who stood silent and motionless, his face carefully blank. Then suddenly in the gallery at the far end of the hall appeared an older lad with a silver badge in his buttonhole. He was crimson and breathless, but managed to utter a Latin grace without stumbling. At its conclusion the school sat down and fell to, and several silver-badged lads sitting on the opposite side of the high table from Miss Phipps passed her meat, vegetables, and gravy with great politeness. Dr. Brooke's brow remained frowning, however, and he did not speak.

The lad from the balcony now appeared at the Headmaster's elbow.

"Well, Crawford," said Dr. Brooke in a chilling headmasterly tone.

"I must apologize, sir, for being so late," said Crawford, who was still somewhat breathless. "I was working in the library, and my watch disappeared."

"Disappeared, Crawford?" said the Headmaster with a tinge of irony.

"Yes, sir. I was taking notes at the table at the far end, and I'd laid my watch in front of me so as not to be late. Then I went up the iron stairs into the gallery, sir, to look for an old issue of *Nature,* and when I came down, my watch was gone. I was still busy hunting for it when the luncheon bell rang. I ran all the way, sir."

"Very well, very well," said the Headmaster in a forgiving tone. "Sit down and eat your lunch. Miss Phipps, this is F. X. Crawford, our head prefect," he went on as the lad went round the table and seated himself opposite Miss Phipps. "Scholarship boy. Native of the island. Captain of football. Mathematician. Going up to Cambridge when he's done his national service—just won a place."

Miss Phipps bent her writer's eye on the lad. He was strongly built, with broad shoulders, a pleasantly plain face, straight dark hair, and highly intelligent brown eyes. Not wishing to keep him from his meal she contented herself with a smile at the introduction, and did not speak until after the first course. "It must be agreeable to have such a fine swimming beach so near the school," she said then.

"Yes. It's actually part of the school grounds," said Crawford in a friendly tone. "The beach and the cliff on the left, that is. But the cliff is out of bounds except with a master. There's a cave there which is rather dangerous—it has an inner chamber with a very low entrance; you can get cut off in there at high water."

"And how is the swimming arranged?" pursued Miss Phipps. "By house or class?"

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"By class."

"I suppose you prefects," said Miss Phipps, smiling at the row of silver badges opposite her, "are allowed to swim whenever you're free."

"Oh, no!" said Crawford. "The rules are very strict—"

"Never less than three boys are allowed to be in the water together," boomed the Headmaster in her ear. "And to become a three-swimmer, as we call them, a boy has to pass very severe swimming tests. We have a swimming pool as well, you know. He has to do two lengths of the pool, two breadths underwater, and a life-saving test."

"And are you a three-swimmer?" inquired Miss Phipps of Crawford.

"Only this term—I've never had time before to work up for the tests," said the lad without embarrassment.

"Life is real, life is earnest, for those who want to reach scholarship standard in mathematics," said the Headmaster. "Isn't that so, Crawford?"

"It is indeed, sir," said Crawford, laughing.

"However, there are compensations. Football match this afternoon," continued the Headmaster.

"Yes. It's strange about my watch, sir, isn't it?" said the boy.

"We'll have a word about that this evening, Crawford," said the Headmaster, dismissing the subject.

"Yes sir," agreed Crawford readily.

"Star Isle! Star Isle!" shouted Miss Phipps encouragingly. "Well passed, sir! Good heavens, what a fumble! Look out, Star Isle! Oh—" her voice changed to satisfaction—"Crawford's got it. A very reliable player, Crawford," she added in her normal tone, turning to the Headmaster.

Muffled to the eyebrows, she sat between the Headmaster and his wife, watching the football match. The Brooke baby lay asleep in his pram behind the white-painted seat. The College buildings provided shelter on the sea side of the field, but the other sides were open to the briskly blowing breeze.

"Crawford," said the Headmaster with emphasis, "is very reliable in any activity he undertakes. A strong, steady character. Humble circumstances at home, you know. Excellent head prefect. Very much respected. Good bowler, too. Ah!" he exclaimed.

"He's hurt!" cried Miss Phipps in a tone of anguish.

Indeed, in tackling an opposing forward, Crawford seemed to have suffered an injury, for a group had gathered round him as he lay on the ground. He got to his knees and tried to rise, but bent double again in evident pain.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Miss Phipps.

"Probably just winded," said the Headmaster.

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A group of boys wearing First Aid armbands now ran up bearing a stretcher. Crawford waved them impatiently aside and again tried to rise, but again fell to his knees. The First Aid detachment, obviously eager to show their skill, stood no more nonsense from him, but rolled him onto the stretcher and carried him off. The Headmaster laughed.

"Poor Crawford!" he said. "He'll be furious."

"But isn't he hurt?" cried Miss Phipps. "Look, there's an ambulance!"

"Yes. They'll take him off to the Sanatorium for a check-up," said Dr. Brooke. "Being winded can be a trying and painful experience, you know—I've been winded myself in the days when I played scrum-half. But it isn't serious. He'll be all right tomorrow. He'll be the first case in the San this term, won't he, Ella?"

"Yes. So far we've been lucky in that respect," said Mrs. Brooke.

"Where is the San?" enquired Miss Phipps.

"Up there toward the cliff," said Dr. Brooke, pointing.

"Odd about Crawford's watch, wasn't it?" said Miss Phipps.

"Very," said the Headmaster shortly.

The whistle sounded. Star Isle had won handsomely. Miss Phipps walked off the field with Mrs. Brooke, assisting her occasionally with the pram. The Headmaster, accosted by several friends, parents, and well-wishers, fell behind.

At the entrance to the College, Mrs. Brooke and Miss Phipps were met by Miss Bellivant. The housekeeper was in such a state of agitation that for a moment Miss Phipps feared that Crawford was seriously hurt after all, and Mrs. Brooke obviously thought the same, for she quickly spoke his name.

"No, no, he's just winded—he'll be all right tomorrow, they say," said the housekeeper. "It's the ice cream, Mrs. Brooke. I'm sure I'm most terribly sorry—I know how much the boys look forward to it. I'd made it striped with the College colors as a special treat—just for the two competing teams, you know—we do so like to give our visitors a really *good* tea, Miss Phipps. It's all so disappointing, I could cry!" Her face quivered, tears actually came to her eyes, and her usual superior, martyred expression had quite vanished. She looked genuinely distressed.

"I don't quite understand, Miss Bellivant," said Mrs. Brooke soothingly. "Has something gone wrong with the ice cream?"

"Ruined!" exclaimed Miss Bellivant dramatically. "The door of the small refrigerator has been left open, and the ice cream is all melted."

"Who left the door open? Surely it was very careless," said Mrs. Brooke, frowning.

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"That's just it, Mrs. Brooke! I can't find out *who* left it open," wailed Miss Bellivant. "It was closed at half-past two when I put the ice cream in—I closed it myself. And all the girls are off duty this afternoon until four. I put the ice cream in, I made sure the door was closed, and I set the freezer," she detailed, performing the movements with her empty hands. "Then I went out to watch some of the match. I left a few minutes before the end and went straight to the fridge. The door wasn't latched and I pulled it open wide and there was all the ice cream completely melted. All the stripes run into each other," she wept, "they look really horrid. I hardly think we shall be able to use the ice cream even after it's frozen again, it looks so horrid! So wasteful, Mrs. Brooke! It seems like carelessness on my part, but really the door *was* closed when I left it—"

Her lamentations continued.

"Miss Bellivant," interrupted Miss Phipps, "have you missed any food from the College kitchens lately?"

Miss Bellivant, tear-stained and disheveled, gazed at her.

"Well, Miss Phipps, when you cater for three hundred boys three meals a day, it's not easy to say whether any food's missing or not," she said. "I mean, what's a bun or two among three hundred? But once or twice I have thought —but I couldn't say for certain. But the ice cream! I'd made it striped in the College colors as a special treat—"

It was some minutes before Miss Phipps could detach herself. She went up to the room that had been assigned to her thoughtfully.

That evening Miss Phipps lectured to the boys on *The History of the Modern Detective Novel.* The lecture proved a huge success, and as Dr. and Mrs. Brooke and Miss Phipps sat together round the fire afterward, sipping coffee, the Headmaster's manner was a good deal more cordial than it had been earlier in the day.

"You know Detective-Inspector Tarrant pretty well, I believe?" he said, passing Miss Phipps the sugar.

"Yes."

"Did he happen to tell you that we recently consulted him at the College?"

"No, he did not," said Miss Phipps.

"But you have helped him on some of his cases, haven't you?"

"When he has asked me, I have offered one or two suggestions," said Miss Phipps in her primmest tone.

"I perceive you are a woman of intelligence and discretion, Miss Phipps," said the Headmaster, smiling.

Miss Phipps bowed her head in acknowledgment, curious to know

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what the Headmaster wished to confide to her.

"I should be very grateful for your advice," Dr. Brooke went on. "We have had here lately—we have suffered—really if one could credit such nonsense, one might imagine a poltergeist has been at work here."

"I had a case once, in your cathedral city of Starminster, in which an alleged poltergeist figured," said Miss Phipps. "But of course the agency proved to be human—*very* human. But please go on."

"We have had in Star Isle College during the last few weeks a series of curious happenings," said Dr. Brooke, speaking in a quiet, precise way, as though teaching a class constitutional history. "To begin with, there were several thefts."

"Of what?"

"Small sums of money. An odd feature of the thefts was this: the whole of the sum available was never taken. If it was money from the pocket of a boy's coat, only one or two coins would be missing; if it was notes from a master's wallet, again, some notes would always be left."

"As if the thief hoped the theft might not be noticed," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully.

"The same sort of thing happened with sweets and biscuits in the boys' tuck-boxes and lockers," continued the Headmaster. "It was then that I asked Inspector Tarrant's advice. But he couldn't attempt to find the thief, he said, unless I would give him freedom to tackle the boys openly. I was considering this, when the thefts ceased. Then odd things began to happen—"

"The replaced baby's rattle, the upset reports, Crawford's missing watch, the ruined ice cream, for example," said Miss Phipps.

"Yes—and all the contents of our drama wardrobe wicker baskets tumbled about and creased," added Mrs. Brooke.

"It is certainly difficult to reduce such varied incidents to any orderly motivation," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "They appear to lack coherence."

"There is *no* sense whatever in the incidents," said the Headmaster warmly. "Stealing money and sweets is detestable, but at least it is understandable. But why upset poor old Pryce's reports? Why ruin the ice cream? Why steal a watch you'd never dare to wear? Even supposing some items of the theatrical wardrobe have been removed, what could a boy do with period clothes?"

"And why pick up, then put back the baby's rattle?" said Mrs. Brooke with a shiver.

"I own that perplexes me particularly," said the Headmaster. "All the other incidents might be attributed to some form of malice—but to do any hanky-panky with a baby's rattle seems—well, I confess I'm disturbed."

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"Yes, it is queer," said Miss Phipps slowly. "To get to the truth in this affair, we must distinguish, I believe, between actions which accomplished their object, actions which failed or were left uncompleted, and actions which were merely incidental. Sometimes one can discover the motive for an action quite simply by considering its effect."

"But what effect had the replacement of the rattle, in heaven's name?" said the Headmaster impatiently.

"Ah, I think it didn't have the desired effect," mused Miss Phipps. "It was done too late—it was one of the failures."

The Brookes gazed at her open-mouthed.

"Miss Phipps," said the Headmaster at length, "you alarm me even more."

"I think you have every right to be alarmed," said Miss Phipps gravely. "I believe it would be well to summon Inspector Tarrant at once."

"I'll ring him up immediately," said the Headmaster, starting toward the telephone.

The Brittlesea police station said that Inspector Tarrant was engaged in conference with the Governor of the County Gaol and could not be disturbed, but he would come out to Star Isle first thing next morning.

Miss Phipps wondered if that would not be too late . . .

First thing next morning, Miss Phipps was wakened by Mrs. Brooke, bearing a cup of tea in her hand and a look of disaster on her young face.

"The baby?" queried Miss Phipps in alarm, shooting upright. "Your husband?"

"No. Crawford."

"You don't mean his—er—being winded has taken a serious turn?"

"No. He was perfectly all right when Henry went over to see him late last night. No, it's not that. He's disappeared."

"Disappeared? This is very serious indeed," said Miss Phipps, throwing back the bedclothes. "What clothes has he disappeared in? He had pajamas and bedroom slippers and a dressing gown in the sanatorium, I suppose?"

"Yes. They're all gone. But, oh, Miss Phipps," said young Mrs. Brooke, weeping, "we've found them all on the beach just above high-water mark."

"We must get Inspector Tarrant here at once," said Miss Phipps. "I will dress instantly. How does your husband explain the matter?"

"He thinks Crawford must be responsible for all the strange things which have been happening this term—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Phipps with vigor.

"—the poor boy must have had a breakdown from overwork."

"Do you mean you think he has drowned himself?"

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"That seems most likely. Or, of course, he may just have decided to take a swim in the middle of the night, being nervously unbalanced."

"Preposterous! A boy who is head prefect, to break one of the strictest rules of the school! I don't believe it," said Miss Phipps. "Besides, my dear, consider. Crawford was in Chapel when the baby's rattle was replaced. He was on the football field when the refrigerator door was opened."

"He could have done the other things," said Mrs. Brooke doubtfully.

"Yes. But not the rattle or the fridge. A problem is not solved unless the solution fits *all* the conditions."

Mrs. Brooke's face cleared a little. "I do so hope you're right," she said. "It would be terrible to have to tell his parents he was a thief. They were so proud of him."

"Let us hope they will continue to be," said Miss Phipps, energetically donning her dressing gown. "The tide is pretty high, I see, but on the ebb."

By the time she was dressed and ready to go downstairs, Inspector Tarrant had arrived from Brittlesea. The large police car, she noticed from the staircase window, was standing in the gravel circle by the Headmaster's terrace, with a plain-clothes constable at the wheel. She entered the sitting room and found Dr. and Mrs. Brooke and Inspector Tarrant in grave consultation, with a sergeant taking notes.

"Dr. Brooke," rapped out Miss Phipps sharply. "Is there a room available which does not look onto your terrace? Your study? Then please let us go there."

The Headmaster colored a little at being thus ordered about in his own school, but said politely, "This way," and led the party along a corridor.

"Meanwhile, John," said Miss Phipps to Inspector Tarrant, "oblige me by summoning your constable indoors on some pretext."

Inspector Tarrant raised his eyebrows.

"Have you some idea about this troubling affair?" he said.

"Yes. It may be wrong, but if it's right, it will be much better for your constable to come in here for a few moments," said Miss Phipps firmly.

Tarrant sent the sergeant on the errand.

"Now," said Miss Phipps when they were all assembled, "as I said just now, my solution to this problem may be completely wrong. But it is worth trying. I write detective stories. One of my methods is to invent a series of strange incidents —at first sight, inexplicable—and then try to think out a set of circumstances which will explain them. That is what I have done here. I set myself to invent something or somebody that will ex-

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plain *every* strange incident that has happened at Star Isle College."

"And you have succeeded?" inquired the Headmaster, obvious irony in his tone.

"Yes," said Miss Phipps with quiet confidence. "Here is the solution I have deduced. The thefts of food and money are easily explained by the presence of somebody on the College premises who is without resources. He is hiding here. He needs food. He needs money for later on—after he has escaped from the island. He needs a watch, so as to know when he may expect the various classrooms to be empty. He is a man, I think, belonging to a lower income bracket, for he is unaccustomed to refrigerators, he cannot drive a car or manage a boat. He likes the lighter forms of literature to read. He climbs in and out of the masters' common-room, opening the window and upsetting poor old Mr. Pryce's reports, on the chance that the masters have left some coffee over from their elevenses—something to drink during the day," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully, "and even something to drink *from*, may well have been one of his most serious problems."

"Why did he pick up the baby's rattle?" said his wife.

"And why does he stay here?" said the Headmaster.

"How do you know he can't drive a car?" said Tarrant.

"He is a small man," continued Miss Phipps, "and Star Isle is an island."

"For heavens' sake, Miss Phipps!" exclaimed the Headmaster. "Please explain yourself."

"The channel of water between Star Isle and the mainland," said Miss Phipps, "is too deep to wade and too wide for any ordinary man to swim. Moreover, it has dangerous currents, and quicksands near the mainland shore. As I said, it must be postulated that this man cannot manage a boat. *So how is he to get off the island?*"

"How did he get on it in the first place?" asked Tarrant grimly.

"My dear John," said Miss Phipps, delighted. "From the tone of your question I gather that my deductions are not totally wide of the mark. Am I not right?"

"Possibly," said Tarrant. "But please answer my question. How did this man get on the island in the first place?"

"In the luggage compartment of a car, of course," said Miss Phipps triumphantly. "He was a criminal, you see—a prisoner escaping from the County gaol—and being hard-pressed by his pursuers he climbed into the trunk compartment of a temporarily unoccupied car. The car then moved off and came to this island. Imagine the poor little man's horror when he cautiously peeped out, perhaps, and found himself on the ferry! The car brings him to the College. So here he is, with plenty of food in the

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kitchens, and money to steal for his needs to come—but in moderation, for he doesn't want to excite suspicion while he's here by taking too obviously or too much. Clothes from a heap of old wicker baskets would seem to him unlikely to be missed. He has a handy cave to hide in when it's low tide, and the extensive College buildings to roam in at night. When the tide is high in the daytime, life isn't quite so easy for him; it's dark and damp and eerie in that inner cave, so he has to risk coming ashore in daylight. Naturally he's anxious to get off the island and rejoin his friends. But how is he to get off the island? If he tries the ferryboat, there will be the ticket collectors to face, perhaps even the police. His best chance is to get off *the same way he came on.* So he is continually on the lookout for cars."

"But all this doesn't explain the baby's rattle!" cried Mrs. Brooke.

"Yes, it does, my dear. The Bishop of Southshire preached here that morning, you said."

"Yes, yes."

"He came over in a car—a large car?"

"Yes!"

"He drove himself?"

"No—his young chaplain drove him."

"Same thing from our point of view," said Miss Phipps. "The chaplain attended the service in your Chapel, of course. The car stood unattended in the circle of gravel by your front door. The criminal approached. And then your baby dropped his rattle and began to cry. Now what happens when a baby cries?"

"One goes to the baby, of course," said Mrs. Brooke.

"Exactly. So the criminal puts the rattle back in the pram to stop the baby crying—for crying is bound to bring someone to the pram, and he will be seen. But unfortunately—from his point of view—he is too late! You are already running down the stairs to your baby. The criminal quickly hides himself—it is touch and go, a matter of split seconds—so he has no time to open the trunk compartment."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Brooke with another shudder. "To think of that odious little man being so near to the baby!"

"My dear," said the Headmaster, "remember, this is all mere supposition. And how," he added, turning to Miss Phipps, "does your theory explain the disappearance of poor Crawford?"

Miss Phipps shook her head gravely. "I'm afraid poor Crawford saw the criminal. You see, the Sanatorium has been empty save for the staff, hasn't it? There have been no previous cases this term, you said, Headmaster. The criminal has been accustomed to regard the Sanatorium sickrooms as safe. Crawford saw him there."

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"The criminal ran off to the cave," suggested the Headmaster, interested now in spite of himself.

"And young Mr. Crawford followed him," put in Tarrant. "The tide would be at halfway."

"The criminal knocked Crawford out and tied him up there."

"But he knows he has to make a getaway before the next low tide, when Crawford, having recovered consciousness meanwhile, will come back and reveal the criminal's presence."

"So the escaped prisoner may make an attempt in your car, now that it's unobserved," warned Miss Phipps.

"Surely not in a police car," objected Tarrant.

"None of you is in uniform," said Miss Phipps. "He may not notice the small blue police sign. And besides, he is now desperately anxious to get off the island."

"So all we have to do," said Tarrant, smiling, "is to arrest Simthwaite in the trunk compartment of my own car—"

"Simthwaite!" exclaimed the Headmaster. "Who's Simthwaite?"

"He's a petty thief, a kind of cat burglar—he escaped from the Southshire County Gaol a few weeks ago," began Tarrant.

"What!" cried the Headmaster. "Do you really mean there *is* such a man as Miss Phipps describes loose on the premises?"

The men were glaring at each other when suddenly all four of them hurled themselves from the room. Shouts and a high yell in an unfamiliar Cockney voice seemed to indicate that something exciting was taking place outside. The two women ran to the front door.

The trunk compartment of the police car stood open; half in, half out, a chubby, balding little man with the beginning of a fluffy beard, clad in a pair of tight black Victorian trousers and a frogged velvet smoking jacket, was just having handcuffs clasped on him by the sergeant, who had removed a watch from the little thief's wrist to facilitate the operation.

"But what about poor Crawford?" cried Mrs. Brooke. "Has that little brute hurt him?"

"No, no, lady," said the little man earnestly. "I ain't 'urt 'im. Never no violence from Slippery Sim. Just knocked 'im out and left 'im in that inner cave—'e'll be as right as rain when the tide goes down. Shouldn't wonder if 'e ain't hollerin' out there right now. I didn't do no 'arm to your baby neither—just give 'im back 'is rattle. *I* didn't wanter stay in your high-falutin' College, I can tell you. I'll be glad to see the back of it, and that's the truth, lady."

"Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Phipps," said the Headmaster, shaking her hand warmly, "on an admirable piece of ratiocination."

"Elementary, my dear Doctor," said Miss Phipps, smiling brightly.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES M. ULLMAN**

TITLE: ***Road Hog***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: A suburb in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Barlow drove too fast, didn't stay in his own lane, abused other drivers on the road, and even drank too much for safe driving. A story of menace, danger—and horror.*

BARLOW CURSED AND SLAMMED his foot down on the brake pedal, at the same time turning the wheel sharply. Tires screamed and his car jerked to a halt.

Why, the guy would have run right into him if Barlow hadn't stopped! Made a left turn smack into Barlow's path!

Slowly, the other car continued its turn. Barlow's window was down. As the other car, an old green sedan, pulled alongside headed in the opposite direction, Barlow stuck his head out.

"Careful, dear," his wife Evelyn cautioned.

But Barlow glared at the other driver, a stupid-faced, immense man with dark brows and mammoth shoulders encased in a leather jacket. The other driver was alone. His window was also down.

"You road hog," Barlow shouted. "You drive like a crazy man. You made that turn right in front of me. Didn't you see me coming? You ought to be in an asylum instead of driving a car on the city streets!"

The other car slowed down, as though the big driver intended to stop and reply. But Barlow angrily pulled his head in, shoved his own car into first, and stepped on the gas. As he sped away, Barlow looked in the rear-view mirror and saw that the other car had come to a stop, and that the other driver was looking back at him.

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"Guys like that," Barlow said tensely, eyes straight ahead, "got to be told off now and then. They'll give any knucklehead a license to drive these days."

"You were driving pretty fast yourself, dear," his wife pointed out. "This isn't a one-way street, you know."

"He saw me coming," Barlow replied irritably. "He had no call to make a turn that way. All he had to do was wait a second and let me go by."

His wife shrugged and looked away.

"All right," she sighed. "But I still don't think you should shout at other drivers. One day you'll get us into trouble."

Barlow was involved in another traffic incident a few minutes later. It happened at a stoplight to an intersection a half block from the cloverleaf to the superhighway. Barlow intended to take the superhighway out of the city.

The light was red. Barlow's car was in the first rank. His car was in gear and as the red snapped to yellow, Barlow stepped on the accelerator and his car jolted forward. But a delivery truck, trying to make the yellow light on the cross street before the light turned red, loomed unexpectedly before him. Barlow had to screech to a stop part-way through the intersection in order to avoid a collision.

Barlow gazed with hatred at the disappearing delivery truck. He shoved the gear back into first and clomped down hard on the accelerator, starting the car again with a squeal of tires.

"Some people," he muttered. "Probably some punk kid driving that truck. Put a kid in a truck that doesn't belong to him and he drives like a maniac."

"You're going pretty fast," his wife said. "The Nortons aren't expecting us until two. We've got plenty of time."

"Not on a Sunday," Barlow replied grimly. His car was now in a line turning into the cloverleaf and Barlow had to slow down. Steering the car with one hand, he put a cigarette in his mouth, ignited it with the dashboard lighter, and puffed intently. They arrived at the expressway and Barlow cut sharply into traffic, forcing another car to veer to an outside lane.

"Every screwball and his cousin are out on the road on Sunday," Barlow went on authoritatively. "All the goofs who never drive a car during the week. They pile the kids into the car on Sunday and go rubbernecking around, cluttering up every highway. Those people don't know how to drive on modern turnpikes. They drive slow in the fast lanes and fast in the slow ones. Here, see what I mean? This idiot ahead of me."

Barlow had been maneuvering from lane to lane in order to pass the slower drivers. He was in the

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next-to-fastest lane now but was trapped behind a slow-moving sedan. Through the rear window of the car ahead two little girls peered wonderingly at him. The couple in the front seat were obviously their parents.

"This guy is a jerk," Barlow pronounced. "At the speed he's going, he has no right to be in this lane. He ought to be over in the slow lane—cripes!"

Barlow accelerated a little and pulled to within a few feet of the car ahead, trying to force the other driver to increase speed. He followed the other car that way for about a quarter of a mile, but the other driver refused to change his plodding pace.

"You'd think," Barlow said sarcastically, "that he'd catch on and get out of the way. But no, not him—oh, no!"

Barlow tooted his horn—a long, insistent blast. The little girls in the rear window waved gaily.

"Oh, brother," Barlow exclaimed. "I give up!"

Barlow flopped back in his seat, holding the steering wheel lightly with the fingers of his left hand. He slowed to the point where the car that had been abreast of him on the left got far enough ahead for Barlow to cut out suddenly into the left lane, and then Barlow stepped on the gas.

"Dear," his wife said tentatively.

"What is it?" Barlow asked with a show of irritation. He was trapped again behind another slow car. They had been on the superhighway for nearly half an hour now, one of hundreds of cars moving swiftly along the big white track.

"That car that just went by—the one up ahead on the right. That man was in it."

"What man?"

"The man you shouted at. You know, the man who made the turn in front of you back on Evergreen Street."

Barlow glanced briefly in the direction his wife had indicated. Yes, there was an old green sedan resembling the car that had made the turn; but Barlow couldn't be sure.

"I doubt it," he said. "The guy wasn't going in our direction."

"He could have turned around and followed us," his wife said. "And I'm *sure* that's the man. He stared at us as he went by. He was a very big man in a leather jacket and he looked sort of sullen. He didn't look right to me."

"You're imagining things," Barlow replied. He experienced a tinge of concern himself, but then reasoned that if it really was the man, it was only coincidence. A lot of cars traveled the superhighway on Sunday afternoon. There would be no reason why the man in the leather jacket shouldn't travel it, too.

"I didn't like that man," Evelyn Barlow said. "He looked mighty

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queer to me. You shouldn't have shouted at him. And you shouldn't have called him crazy."

"Don't be silly," Barlow said. He saw an opening to his left and cut sharply into the fast lane. Then he relaxed and bore down on the gas pedal. The drivers ahead of him in this lane knew their stuff, all right. They were all barreling along at about seventy.

"We're passing him," his wife said.

"Where?"

"Over there—two lanes over."

Barlow craned his head for a quick glance but didn't see much. Just that it was an old green sedan. He couldn't get a glimpse of the driver.

Barlow turned his head back to face the road.

"Well, he's behind us now," he said. "Traffic will thin out after the next big turnoff. Whoever the guy is, we'll leave him far behind. That old heap of his will never catch up with us."

Evelyn Barlow had turned in her seat and was peering back.

"He's still there," she reported. "It looks as if he's changing lanes. He's moving out into our lane—yes, there he is. He's in our lane now. I can't see him any more—but he's in our lane."

"Stop that," Barlow commanded. "Turn around and forget that old car. The chances are a million to one against it being the same man."

"But he *stared* at us."

"Nonsense!"

"I wish the Nortons didn't live so far out," his wife continued. "I wish they lived some place closer where there are lights and people and things. I don't like those little side roads out where the Nortons live."

"Stop talking like a schoolgirl," Barlow said. "Relax and try to enjoy yourself."

The road where Barlow turned off was nearly at the end of the expressway. Traffic had thinned considerably at this point. As Barlow veered off the expressway and slowed for the cloverleaf, his wife, despite Barlow's admonition, turned again and looked back.

"Well," Barlow asked with mock jocularity, "do you still see our mysterious friend?"

"I'm not sure."

"Well, I'm sure," Barlow said. "In the first place, it probably isn't the same man. In the second place, if it is the man, he probably turned off before now. And in the third place, if he didn't turn off, he couldn't have kept up with us. I was going nearly eighty that last stretch."

They stopped for a red light at the end of the cloverleaf. Except for a restaurant and a motel the countryside was desolate. Barlow drummed his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel.

"Ridiculous," he muttered. "Putting a traffic signal out here in the

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middle of nowhere. They ought to have a stop sign, that's enough."

The light turned green. Barlow pulled away.

"That Ed Norton," Barlow said. "I suppose he'll want to serve martinis before dinner. Ever watch Ed Norton make a martini? It's a joke. He uses at least half vermouth. Me, I'm sticking to bourbon on the rocks all afternoon."

"Don't drink too much," his wife advised. "Remember we have a long drive home."

"Don't you worry about me."

"I think it would be nice, dear, if we left a little earlier this time. Before dark."

"Are you kidding? Four times a year or so we see Ed and Marie Norton and you want to drop in and eat Marie's dinner and then say goodbye! Why, the Nortons used to be our best friends when we lived on Montgomery Street. We can't be rude. You know Ed. He'll want to play poker after dinner, and Marie always fixes a late snack. Anyhow, I dropped six bucks the last time we had a session and I intend to win it back."

They had been driving rapidly up a long, gentle slope. As they neared the crest, Barlow glanced into his rear-view mirror. Far behind him another car had turned off the expressway and was heading in the same direction. It might be an old green sedan, but at this distance Barlow couldn't be sure.

Barlow's car topped the hill. He pushed his right foot farther down on the gas pedal.

"You're going too fast for this narrow little road," his wife said.

"Don't want to be late," Barlow muttered.

Barlow had his hat and coat on and a glass in his hand.

"Here's one for the road," he said. He tipped the glass, drained it, and set it down on a coffee table. "It's been great, Ed. We want you and Marie to come see us next month—after we get the new carpeting. Things are in a mess right now."

They shook hands all around. Ed and Marie Norton walked out to the car with the Barlows. It was dark and even with the porch light on Barlow stumbled once or twice.

"Take it easy going back," Norton said. "They're doing a lot of construction on the stretch two miles up the road. There's a pretty steep drop on the left that doesn't have any guard rail."

"Don't worry," Barlow said. "I know the road by heart."

He got in on the driver's side and Ed Norton opened the other door for Mrs. Barlow. The doors slammed shut. Barlow switched on the ignition and started the motor.

"Be seeing you," Barlow called. "Ed, I'll give you a ring next week. And thanks for letting me win my money back."

"So long."

"Goodbye," Evelyn Barlow said.

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Barlow's car lurched slowly down the driveway and into the road, the headlights cutting through the darkness.

"It's pretty late," his wife said.

"Not even ten."

"Probably midnight before we get home. It's chilly."

"Close the window then."

They turned a corner and Norton's house was out of sight. Occasionally they passed other houses but for long stretches on this winding road they saw no lights at all. Barlow was driving at about forty.

"That construction area comes up about now," Barlow said. They approached another turn and Barlow took his foot off the gas pedal and gradually slowed down.

But as they started into the turn another pair of headlights snapped on almost in front of them. Another car came bounding out of a side road, forcing Barlow to turn his wheel and brake hard. Barlow's wife screamed. Barlow shouted an incoherent rage and held tight to the wheel, finally stopping the car on the shoulder of the road. The other car had pulled up beside him.

Barlow put his head out the window.

"You madman," he raged. "What in hell do you think you're doing?"

No reply came from the other car. As Barlow's eyes became accustomed to the dark he noticed that it was an old car. An old sedan. Green, maybe.

Then the other car's door opened. A stolid, massive figure stepped out—a man in a leather jacket. . . .

The state trooper was down on his knees, examining the tire marks with his flashlight. Below him, on the ledge of rocks, a small group of men had gathered about the wreckage of what had been Barlow's car. They were extricating the bodies.

"He wasn't going fast at all," the trooper mused. "Wonder what made him go clean off the road that way?"

"We'll never know," said a sheriff's deputy standing beside him. "Funny thing. They both had broken backs. Broken in the same way. Sort of freak accident. I don't quite see how it could have happened."

The trooper rose and stretched. He rubbed the back of his head.

"You know," he said, "there was one just like it out by Hadley Road last spring. Guy driving alone at night went smack into a brick wall for no good reason. He had a busted back, too, and I couldn't figure out how he got it. Then three weeks ago, another guy —he was alone at night too. Found his car upside-down in a ditch by the canal with him dead the same as those two down there. Almost as if some very big man put them across his knee and snapped their spines. But it must be coincidence. What else could it be?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CECIL CURTIS**

TITLE: ***Third Degree***

TYPE: Detective-Crime Story

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The job had been well planned. The bandits held up the bank and made a clean getaway with $65,000. The story of a typical bank robbery?* Don't you believe it!

THEY HIT THE BANK AT EXACTLY 11:45 on Friday morning. The job had been well planned. One man stayed in the car. Two other men scooped $65,000 into a bag while a fourth stood just inside the door and gently waved a gun to discourage any idea of interference. There was no rough stuff. Only three employees were in the bank at the time—a teller, a girl clerk, and Martin, the cashier. There were two customers, but they played it smart and did not cause any trouble.

After the bandits left, the teller punched an alarm button, the girl clerk screamed, and the cashier grabbed a gun and went after them. They were getting into an Oldsmobile at the curb. The cashier sprayed bullets at them. Gibbs, the man who had guarded the door, and Cooney, the getaway driver, returned the fire. One of them winged the cashier. At the same time Gibbs was hit and fell to the sidewalk. Gibbs's pals didn't waste any time on him. The three of them were in the car by this time, and the Oldsmobile took off. They were gone before anyone on the street realized what had happened.

Gibbs was dead. The cashier's wound was little more than a scratch.

The town was sewed up at once. The highway patrol put barricades on all the roads. They found the Oldsmobile less than a mile out of town in a clump of trees just past Miller's Creek. They hauled it in for a going-over, but there was no

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clue. It belonged to Doc Wilson who always parked it in the same place—only two blocks from the bank. It had been stolen just a few minutes before the holdup. There was no trace of the three robbers who were still alive.

Brady called me about 4:30 to tell me that the two men who had scooped the money into the bag—Mason and Forrest—had been picked up. They talked. After ditching the Oldsmobile, the three bandits had doubled back into town in a Ford, according to plan. Just beyond the railroad yards Cooney had stopped the car and ordered Mason and Forrest to get out. They got, because Cooney backed up his words with a gun which the other two knew he had no reluctance to use.

Brady told me he was sure Mason and Forrest were telling a straight story. They had no idea where Cooney had gone with the money. I saw no point in talking to them; so I told Brady to put them on ice and then to get out with Johannsen and find Cooney.

Brady and Johannsen were good. It took them only four hours. Brady called me at 8:30 to tell me that they had Cooney.

"Did you find the money on him?"

"No money, Chief. He still had the rod and wanted to use it, but the Swede discouraged him."

"Is he hurt?"

"Just a bump on the head."

That took care of the four guys who had hit the bank. It took care of everything except the money. I had to find that money.

"Does Cooney show any signs of being ready to talk?"

"Well, Chief, we could work on him for a while." Brady sounded dubious.

"But you don't think it would do any good?"

"We can always make a guy talk, you know that. But the Swede says this guy won't talk unless we do things that are gonna mark him up. Me, I think the Swede knows. If he says a guy won't talk, the guy won't talk."

I thought so too. And I didn't want Cooney marked up.

"Where are you?" I asked Brady.

"An apartment off Deauville Place."

"Keep him there for about an hour. Then bring him over here. Don't tell him anything. And don't be seen."

"Okay, Chief."

I got out a fresh cigar and sat down to think. We had to get that money. Cooney must be made to talk. Maybe he could be tricked. I was staring idly at the blank face of the television screen when I got the glimmering of an idea. Perhaps I could rig something.

I sat and thought about it for a while. Then I got up to look over the gear that was available to see what I could hook up. It just

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might be that my hobby of electronics could be made to pay off. I brought out a tape recording machine, hi-fi amplifier, and an oscilloscope. From the scrounge box I picked out a modulation meter.

I hooked up the gear in an impressive looking layout. Then I went through my tape library and picked out a recording of the *Bolero*. I threaded the tape in the machine. The tape would feed a signal that would make the needle of the modulation meter dance madly. Then the signal would feed into the oscilloscope and give me a picture. As an afterthought, I rigged a microphone conspicuously on the table. Technically, the hookup was meaningless, but it looked scientific. I wasn't sure that I could do anything, but I figured that Cooney must have a weak spot that could be dug out. This array of "laboratory" gear might help to frighten him, or keep his mind off what I was trying to do.

I sat down and waited for Brady and Johannsen to bring him in.

Cooney was a tough guy and a smart one.

"You might just as well go and book me. Then I can call my lawyer. Until then, I got nothing to say."

"Sit down and shut up," I told him. "We don't want to hear anything from you. We just want you to listen."

Cooney sat down, obviously puzzled.

"That guy who was shot down in front of the bank—what was his name, Brady?" I asked.

"Gibbs, Chief."

"Yeah, Gibbs." I looked at Cooney. He had a queer, strained look on his face. I marked it down; I was going to have to play this one strictly by ear. "Gibbs kicked off. But before he did, he made a statement. We have Forrest and Mason, and they've talked. I'm going to tell you the story as we've pieced it together from their statements. I want to see what your reactions are."

Cooney was badly bothered about something, but he sneered. "You're wasting your time. I can tell you right now, I've got no comment."

"We don't need any comment from you," I told him. "Ever hear of a lie detector?" I waved at the apparatus on the table.

Cooney scowled at it. "I don't have to take no lie detector test. Anyhow, that stuff's no good in court."

"We have no intention of trying to use it in court. And you'll take the test. Just hold out your arm, and I'll put this electrode on it."

He half rose from the chair. I nodded to Johannsen who moved over behind the chair and put his hands on Cooney's shoulders. He did things with his fingers for a few seconds. Cooney groaned and

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sank back into the chair. I strapped the electrode to his wrist.

"Just take it easy," I told him, "and we won't have to tie you to the chair."

"You won't get anything out of me," he snarled.

I shrugged and flicked the switch that started the tape machine.

"The trouble with you cheap crooks is that you don't keep up with science. I don't want you to answer any questions, Cooney. You'll just listen. This is a new type of machine. It records everything, including what I say. You don't have to say a word. It records all your reactions from the electro-chemical reactions in your body. Then we can study the record and get a cross-check on the statements we already have. Look at the machine."

I pointed to the 'scope which was displaying a crazily fluctuating pattern, then to the needle which was flicking wildly across the face of the meter. "That's your electron pattern. It's all going down on the tape. Watch the pattern change while I tell you the story. The changes will chart every one of your mental and physical reactions."

Cooney began to look apprehensive. The sweat started popping out on his face. "What kind of baloney are you handing me?" he asked, but his voice failed to register conviction.

"Cooney, this job was planned by someone who didn't actually take part in it. Gibbs knew who it was. Mason and Forrest say they don't know. We haven't checked them on the machine yet, but I think they're telling the truth. I believe Gibbs was the only one who knew. Unless you know too."

Cooney said nothing. I pretended to study the pattern on the 'scope.

"Yep, the machine says that's right. You don't know who masterminded the job. You knew that the plans called for Gibbs to take the extra cut to pay off the brain."

Cooney was obviously impressed. He said nothing.

"The job came off just as it was planned. You stayed in the car. Mason and Forrest got the money while Gibbs covered them. Outside the bank there was a little ruckus. That cashier—Martin—started shooting and got winged for his trouble. Just a scratch. Gibbs wasn't so lucky. He got his."

The sweat was now flowing freely down Cooney's face. His gaze flicked from my face to the 'scope, then to the meter, then back to my face. He licked his lips. Something here, I thought; watch it closely.

"The cashier gets credit for Gibbs, I guess. Just plain bull luck, the way he was waving that banker's special around, but he did it. The rest of you got away clean. With sixty-five thousand bucks."

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The sneer was back on Cooney's face. He was over the hump about something. Suddenly I got it. I knew I had him.

"You made a clean getaway. You switched from the hot heap and headed back for a hideout here in town, just as the plan called for. But you, Cooney, were getting ideas. Gibbs was gone. That would make your cut bigger. Maybe you could make it bigger still. So you ditched Mason and Forrest. You could have plugged them, but you were too smart for that. There was always a chance that you might be picked up. No use laying yourself open to a murder rap.

"Then you hid the money until you could complete your arrangements to blow. It must have been quite a shock to you when my boys picked you up. Where's the money, Cooney?"

Cooney was openly contemptuous. "That's a nice little fairy tale you've worked up there. Is it supposed to scare me into talking?"

I shook my head. "I wasn't counting on scaring you, Cooney. You've got that money stashed away. Of course, we'll have no trouble getting a conviction, but you don't mind going to the pen on a holdup charge. Everybody knows that a savvy guy with plenty of scratch can get out of there. You figure on being out in a year. I bet it wouldn't cost you more than ten grand."

He gave me a horse laugh. "Anybody who couldn't get out of that place in six months for five gees ought to be sent to the loony bin in the first place."

I nodded. "You're probably right. And with sixty-five grand stashed away, you figure it's pretty good wages. I want that money."

"I bet you do. Why don't you ask that thing," pointing to the gear on the table, "to tell you where it is?"

I stopped the machine and started rewinding the tape.

"Of course, since you are the only one who knows where the money is, we have nothing to check your reactions against. But you may be surprised. It's quite possible this machine will give us something that may make you want to tell us where you hid the dough."

Cooney snorted. "You ought to charge admission. I ain't had such a laugh since vaudeville."

I rethreaded the tape in the machine and took the electrode off his arm. "We are going to charge admission. This is going to cost you sixty-five thousand bucks."

Cooney leaned back in his chair and laughed. Johannsen hovered over him. "Want I should quiet him down, Chief?"

"Let him enjoy himself. He'll change his tune pretty soon. There's something on this tape I want to look at again." I started the machine. "Brady, watch that

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meter. When I signal, tell me what it reads on the top scale."

I pretended to study the 'scope. "Now."

"Eighty-seven, Chief."

I stopped the machine.

"Yeah, I thought so. That does it. You ready to talk, Cooney?"

He stopped laughing and scowled at me. "Let's stop the fun. Book me so I can get my lawyer. He'll talk for me."

I leaned back and put my fingertips together.

"You should have got rid of the gun, Cooney. Though, I guess that really wouldn't have helped. We have Forrest and Mason's guns, and the lab can eliminate them with no trouble. We wouldn't really have to have yours."

"So you're going to try to stick me for plugging the cashier," he sneered. "So what? He ain't hurt. It might get me a few more years, but I ain't planning to stay."

I looked at him for a long time. "The cashier, yeah. But Gibbs won't get you a few more years. He's going to get you the chair. And the whole sixty-five won't buy you out of the death house."

Cooney was suddenly sweating. "What do you mean? That cashier got Gibbs."

"That's what everybody took for granted, including Martin, the cashier. But this machine says different. It says *you* plugged Gibbs. It says you already had ideas about that sixty-five grand. And don't go trying to console yourself with the idea that what this machine says can't be used as evidence. We won't need it. Now that we know where to look, the lab boys can get all the evidence we need. What's that gun of yours, a thirty-eight? Martin had a banker's special thirty-two. Ballistics are perfectly admissible as evidence, and that's what will send you up for a frying."

Cooney was now a sick man. It was plain I had guessed right. I let him sit there and suffer for a while. Then I shrugged. "Okay, boys. Take him away."

Brady and Johannsen grabbed his arms and jerked him out of the chair. I let them get to the door before I spoke again.

"Wait. Turn around. Cooney, you're a rat, but so was Gibbs. It doesn't mean anything special to me to see his killer go to the chair. You can dodge that rap, but it'll cost you sixty-five grand. Want to play ball?"

It took him some time to get that one. Then he had to try several times before he could speak. "You mean you'll let me get away if I tell you where the dough is?"

I snorted. "Put him back in the chair, boys." I waited while they dragged him across the room.

"Don't get any silly ideas, Cooney. You're not going free. But if you tell us where the dough is, you don't have to take a murder rap. You'll go up for the heist job alone."

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He thought it over and came up with a flaw. "But the D.A. won't go for that. He's up for re-election. He'll pin the killing on me to get himself some votes."

"For the love of Mike, use that half a brain you've got," I threw at him. "How is the D.A. ever going to know about it? Everybody is satisfied that the cashier killed Gibbs. Who's going to question it? Maybe you just want to fry."

I knew, of course, that this was nonsense. The laboratory boys would find out as a matter of routine. Probably they already had. But I hoped Cooney would be too rattled by now to figure that out.

He sat there licking his lips and thinking it over. "How do I know you won't cross me—get the dough and then tell them to look for the slug?"

I shrugged it off. "That's just a chance you'll have to take. But why should I? Gibbs means nothing to me. The way I see it, you're going to get a long stretch for the bank job. And with no money, you won't be able to buy a getaway. Maybe when you think it over, you won't even want one. Remember, the guy who planned this job will be waiting to get his hands on you. You might feel a lot safer behind the walls."

I let him stew in it for a while.

"I want to find that sixty-five thousand bucks. That'll do a lot more for me than getting credit for tapping the guy who wiped out a cheap rat. Like you say, I might cross you. That's a chance you'll have to take. It's the only chance you've got. Want it?"

He sat there considering it some more.

"You've got one minute."

He took thirty seconds. "Okay. I want it."

He told us where the dough was. Thirty minutes later Brady brought it back. I put it in the safe.

"Okay, boys, take this thing out and get rid of it."

"Where'll we dump it?" Johannsen wanted to know.

"You still got Mason and Forrest safe? Okay, take the three of them out and stage a little shooting match. Be sure to put the right guns in the right hands. Leave 'em where the cops will find them."

Cooney was on his feet, his eyes blazing. Johannsen and Brady closed in and gripped his arms.

"You mean—you mean, *you ain't cops?*"

I laughed at him. "You saved me the trouble of deciding whether to give Gibbs a split or a bullet, Cooney. Take him away, boys. Let me know when you get back. I'll have something for you."

I decided to give Brady and Johannsen a bonus of five grand each. Even with a generous allowance for expenses, that would leave a clear profit of over fifty grand.

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THE WRIGHTSVILLE HEIRS
by ELLERY QUEEN

(*Continued from page 48*)

Ellery took Amy upstairs in the darkness, but even at the door of her room she would not let go of him.

"I know I'm being silly . . ."

"After I've scared you half to death?" He squeezed her arm. "Let's have a look together."

He searched her bedroom and bathroom. "Nobody here but us chickens," he said and she smiled faintly. "Lock and bolt your door and go to bed. I can get to you in five seconds from across the hall. Understand, Amy?"

"Yes, sir," said Amy; and she suddenly kissed him. Then she flushed scarlet and pushed him into the hall.

He did not move until he heard the key turn over and the bolt slide into place.

He made a groping tour of the sleeping rooms, soundlessly trying doors. Old Dorcas's and Morris Hunker's on the attic floor were unlocked, as was the door to the guest room where Mr. Wentworth snored melodiously. But the Livingston brothers had locked themselves in. He could hear them tossing about in their beds.

The door of their sister's room gave to his touch. Ellery nudged it open, listening.

"Who's that?" Olivia's voice came sharply out of the dark.

"Oh," said Ellery. "Thought this was my room. Sorry."

He let the door click shut loudly. She must sleep like a cat.

It seemed to him as he got into bed that there was a mocking quality to the darkness.

He floundered after sleep, his cheek still tingling where Amy had put her kiss. Lonely little thing . . . remarkably strong. His biceps ached where she had clutched him . . . Old Bella's money would make a full life possible for her . . . And sudden death, too, unless by some miracle he could see guilt where no guilt showed.

He kept straining after every sound in the old house until, exhausted, he fell asleep.

When he came downstairs Wednesday morning Ellery found Olivia and Mr. Wentworth at breakfast.

"Ah, the man who mislaid his room," said Olivia. "Did you ever find it, Mr. Queen?"

Ellery smiled back. "Your brothers still asleep?"

"Sam and Ev? They never roll out before noon."

"I wish Amy would get up," said the lawyer crossly. "I told her last night she'd have to sign some papers this morning. I've got to run over to the Court House."

"Just coffee, Dorcas." Ellery frowned. "Amy hasn't been down yet?"

"Oh, let the child sleep," mur-

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mured Olivia. "She'll collect her million a day later."

Mr. Wentworth glanced at her coldly. "Dorcas—"

"Never mind." Ellery jumped up. "I'll get her."

I've really got to stop acting like an old biddy, Ellery thought as he tried to keep from running up the stairs . . .

He knocked on Amy's door.

"Amy?"

He knocked again, sharply.

"Amy." He tried the door; it was locked. "Amy!"

He rattled the knob.

Doors opened. Everett's voice grumbled somewhere.

"Something wrong, Queen?" That was Samuel, Jr.

"I don't know. *Amy!*" Ellery pounded.

Olivia and the Wrightsville lawyer came flying up the stairs. "What's the matter?"

"Help me with this door!"

At the second lunge the lock and bolt gave. Amy was lying on her bed in a queer way, cramped and very still.

"My God." Mr. Wentworth was ashy. "Is she . . . dead?"

"No," said Ellery swiftly over the unconscious girl. "Phone a doctor, Mr. Wentworth. Conk Farnham if possible. And Dakin. Send Dorcas up immediately, I'll need her till medical help comes. The rest of you—out!"

Dr. Conklin Farnham opened Amy's door. "You can talk to her now."

They tiptoed into the bedroom. The late afternoon sun revealed a bloodless Amy, propped on pillows and looking very small and lost in the big bed. A strapping trained nurse with a pugnacious jaw sat by the bed.

Ellery took Amy's hand. It tightened in his.

"Feeling better now?"

"Yes." She tried to smile.

"What happened last night?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't unlock your door? Let anyone in?"

"No. I took a sleeping pill with some prune juice I had on my night table and went to bed. That's all I remember."

"The laboratory report indicates you swallowed about six of them, Amy—luckily, not a lethal dose. You're sure you took only one tablet?"

"Positive. I'm careful about drugs—Uncle Horace taught me that. It came from a bottle of sleeping pills in my medicine chest."

"We know, Amy. Who brought you that prune juice?" Chief Dakin asked gently.

"Nobody, Mr. Dakin. I'd poured it myself in the kitchen and taken it upstairs with me when I started to go to bed the first time. But I felt restless, so I went back downstairs where I found Mr. Queen on the porch—"

"Leaving the glass on the night

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table." Ellery glanced at Dakin. "I noticed it when I brought Amy back up last night."

"By then it was doped." The police chief glowered. "Somebody snuck into her room while she was down on the back porch talking to you, and he fixed that juice just dandy . . . without leaving a print on anything!"

"Mr. Queen, I'd like to talk to you," Amy said.

"You'll do the rest of your talking tomorrow, young lady," said Dr. Farnham . . . "Now don't worry about her," he told them in the hall. "She'll be as good as new by morning. Mrs. Olin will stay with her all night."

On the way downstairs Dakin said, "I owe you an apology, Mr. Queen. I just never figured they'd try it."

"And I never thought to check that prune juice," Ellery mumbled. "Dakin, is the nurse reliable?"

"Libby Olin?" Dakin snorted. "Well, here they are."

The Livingston trio were sprawled in the drawing room, waiting peacefully under the codfish eye of Mr. Wentworth and one of Chief Dakin's young policemen.

"She's all right, Mr. Wentworth," Ellery said; and he turned to the Livingstons with bitterness. "Whichever of you tried to overdose Amy last night has gambled and lost. She's very much alive, and the lot of us are dedicated to the proposition that she's going to stay that way."

"From now on," growled the chief of police, "Amy Upham's going to be guarded twenty-four hours a day!"

"A smart poker player knows when his luck's run out," Ellery said. "You can't win that million any more, but you can stand pat on the gamble that we won't be able to call you for Bella Livingston's murder or the attempt on Amy."

"And don't go thinking that because we haven't called you yet," said Dakin, "you can pick up and run." His Yankee jaw aimed at them. "You ain't setting foot off these grounds—none of you."

"You know," murmured Samuel Jr., "you fellows amaze me. How long do you suppose you could hold us here if we insisted on leaving? You have absolutely nothing on us."

"And for the simplest of reasons," smiled Olivia. "We haven't done anything."

"What's keeping us here," Everett said, "is a temporary embarrassment and the three crude but nourishing meals a day."

"Well, in my case it's rather more than that." The elder brother set his drink down with a little bang, looking up at Ellery and Dakin with no charm whatever. "At first your accusations were amusing, but now the humor is

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palling. I'm beginning to feel persecuted, gentlemen, and it's a feeling I don't like!"

"On top of which," said Olivia, "a Livingston never runs."

"Besides," grinned Everett, "you might clap us in the pokey. In the present state of my finances, a suit for false arrest would buy me that basketball franchise."

"Neat," said Ellery. "Even convincing. But I repeat—don't press your luck."

He strode out.

"I can't say I blame you, Amy," Ellery said.

"Well, I've had a lot of time to think since yesterday." Amy stared out over the lawn. Ellery kicked one of the loose floorboards.

It was Thursday afternoon, and they were sitting in the old summerhouse on the back lawn. The young policeman was standing under a tree nearby, nervously alert. The sun through the lattice-work checkered Amy's hollow cheeks and frightened eyes in a grotesque pattern. She kept staring out through the summerhouse doorway at the big house, and its rear windows shimmered like eyes.

"We could let them go, of course," muttered Ellery.

"And if one of them skulked back next week? Or even next year?" Amy shook her head. "Don't you see, Mr. Queen, I'd never have another day's peace—for the rest of my life!"

"I can only tell you that we're checking them exhaustively. If we find that one of them is not merely broke but desperately in debt, it will pinpoint a murder motive. And I've had Dakin send the file of prints and material up to Boston as a check on the Connhaven lab." Ellery scowled at the dappled floor. "I don't want to influence you, Amy. It's your life. But a step like this would be irrevocable."

"You think I'm a coward—"

"Hardly, Amy."

"It's not the thought of dying. I'm . . . sort of used to death. My father and mother, Uncle Horace, and . . ." Amy bit her lips. "It's the *fear,*" she said. "The waiting for it. The never knowing."

Amy got up and went to the doorway. In her white summer frock the sunlight gave her a transparency uncomfortably like a ghost's. "I couldn't live a life like that. I'm going back to the house, Mr. Queen, and tell them they can have it all."

Ellery looked up and sprang.

The flash from the attic window and his lunge were almost simultaneous. But the rifle crack reached his ears even as he bowled Amy over from behind onto the grass and covered her with his body.

The policeman was running hard toward the house, tugging at his holster.

Ellery turned his head for a look. The attic window from which the flash had come was empty.

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"What happened?" Amy's voice came muffled, but calm.

"You're not hit?" he demanded.

"Only by you."

He helped her to her feet and stared about, baffled.

Then he saw it.

The bullet had ripped through the summerhouse roof a good eight feet above and beyond where Amy's head had been.

Ellery came downstairs with the rifle just as the policeman was hanging up the phone in the foyer.

"Chief's coming right away, Mr. Queen."

"Talk to Dorcas and Morris Hunker?"

"They didn't see a thing. They were in the kitchen, Dorcas fixing a chicken pie for supper and Morris washing the lunch dishes. All they did was duck."

Ellery found Herbert Wentworth in the drawing room pounding fist into palm, his incensed length between Amy and the Livingstons as if to shield her from a head-on attack.

"I'm good and darn tired of this hocus!" the lawyer was shouting. "You let this girl be, d'ye hear?"

"You bore me, Mr. Wentworth." Olivia's cheeks were spotty with anger. She was in shorts and a halter, and her skin looked oiled.

Her brothers were glaring.

Ellery stepped into the drawing room. The policeman blocked the doorway.

"Samuel R. Livingston's gun," said Ellery, holding it up. "It has his name plate on the butt."

"Father's old deer rifle." Samuel, Jr. half rose.

"Mother Livingston wouldn't part with it." Amy sounded so grim that Ellery glanced at her. "She kept it in the attic storeroom."

"Where I found it, dropped near the window. Plus an old box of ammo freshly broken into. When Dakin gets here we'll have the gun and box gone over." Ellery set the rifle down with care. "While we're waiting, suppose I put the classic question: Where were you three when the shot was fired?"

Olivia shrilled, "I was on the roof taking a sunbath."

"Alone?"

"I sunbathe in the nude, Mr. Queen!"

Ellery glanced at Everett, who was no longer looking at Amy with appreciation. Everett no longer looked at Amy at all.

"I'd been down to the pond for a swim," the chunky brother grunted, "and I was back in the house under a shower. I didn't even hear the shot." His thick body was wrapped in a damp bathrobe.

"And I was sitting right here listening to a news broadcast." Samuel, Jr.'s nostrils were a little pinched. "By the way, I haven't fired a gun in fifteen years, and my sister and brother can't hit the side of a barn."

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"Neither could the one who shot at Amy," Ellery said. "Mr. Wentworth, did you happen to see any of these people?"

"Not soon enough to corroborate their alibis," snapped the lawyer. "The shot woke me from a nap and by the time I got my shoes on they were all together in the hall. Mr. Queen, if Dakin keeps these three on the premises after this—"

"Before we go into better security measures, I believe Amy has an announcement. Amy?"

"No."

"No?"

"I've changed my mind, Mr. Queen." Amy was studying the Livingstons with compressed lips. "I was going to sign everything over to you three after one of you tried to kill me with those sleeping pills. But now I'm *mad!* If you want that money, you're going to have to shoot a lot straighter than you shot today. Because I'm *not* going to be scared off."

Ellery was staring at her. "What did you say, Amy?"

"I said, Mr. Queen, they're not going to scare me any more."

Olivia jumped up. "I've had about as much of this farce—!"

"Sit down, sit down," Ellery said, but he was still staring at Amy Upham. Then he said slowly, "Officer, nobody's to leave this room till Chief Dakin gets here."

He stumbled past the policeman and disappeared.

"There you are." Chief Dakin shut the door of Bella Livingston's bedroom hastily. "No prints on the gun or ammo box, no clues in the attic—no *anything*," he said in despair.

But then he stopped, struck by Ellery's silence.

Ellery was crouched at the old lady's Governor Winthrop desk in the bay overlooking the front lawn. The room had been locked up since the murder, and his hands were dusty. He had pulled open all the drawers and dumped their contents on the desk—letters, household bills, canceled checks, various kinds of stationery, old invitations to Wrightsville functions—the accumulation of years. But Ellery was not looking at them; he was gazing into space.

"Something *else* wrong, Mr. Queen?"

"Sit down, Dakin. I want to talk to you."

Mr. Wentworth was just taking the candlewick spread off his bed Friday night when someone tapped furtively on his door.

"Who is it?"

"Amy." Her whisper was urgent. "Quick."

He snatched the door open, alarmed. "What's the matter?"

"Shh! Nothing. I can't stay but a second—"

"Are you out of your mind, Amy? After we locked you in for the night!"

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Amy whispered rapidly, "Please, I've got to talk to you, Mr. Wentworth. Just *you*."

"Me? Now?"

"No, not now—that policeman keeps trying my door every few minutes. Meet me at the pond tomorrow morning early—say, six o'clock. Will you?" Amy's brown eyes kept searching the hall. "You've got to, Mr. Wentworth," she said fiercely. "*Will* you?"

The lawyer was bewildered. "But Amy—"

But Amy was gone.

Mr. Wentworth hurried through Bella Livingston's woods in the damp of early morning Saturday, shivering. He had tossed about all night, perplexed and uneasy. What could Amy Upham possibly have to confide in him that Queen and Chief Dakin mustn't hear?

And why, he suddenly thought, in such a lonely spot?

He found himself wanting very much to turn back. *It's almost as if I were in danger . . .*

But that was ridiculous.

Mr. Wentworth shivered again and hurried on.

He heard Amy's shriek just as the pond began to glitter through the birch and pine.

"Help! Somebody help!"

The lawyer scrambled out on the tumbledown landing. The Livingston rowboat lay fifty yards offshore, deep in the water and settling fast. Amy was trying frantically to row through a patch of water lilies.

"Mr. Wentworth!" she screamed. *"Somebody put a hole in the boat and I can't swim!"*

The boat suddenly sank. Amy disappeared.

Mr. Wentworth kicked off his shoes in a panic and dived in. He came up gasping. Amy was thrashing about, making glubbing sounds.

"Hang on to the boat!" he yelled. He made directly for her, swimming as fast as he could. She went under again just as he reached her. She came up clutching, all tangled in the lilies. "Let *go*, Amy!" He had to fight her all the way back to the landing. When he dragged her out of the water he was exhausted.

"You all right?" he panted.

"You all right, Amy?" a voice echoed.

"Yes," said Amy in a queer voice; and Mr. Wentworth twisted in amazement. Two men stood behind them. His heart jumped. But then he saw who they were.

"Queen, Dakin!" He staggered to his feet gladly. "Hole in the boat—they tried to drown her—I had to jump in after her—"

"We know," said Ellery. "We saw the whole thing."

"In fact," said Chief Dakin, "it was sort of a trap."

"Trap?" The lawyer shook his head dazedly. "What do you mean?"

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Ellery sat down on a log and lit a cigarette. "You're certainly entitled to the fullest explanation. Right, Amy?"

But Amy said nothing. She suddenly sat up and began to shake out her blonde hair.

"Thursday afternoon," Ellery said, "Amy remarked that she wasn't going to be 'scared' out of her inheritance. That hadn't occurred to me—that the non-lethal dose of sleeping pills and the rifle shot that missed so badly were attempts, not to kill Amy, but merely to frighten her into giving up the estate. It was the wrong possibility, as it turned out, but it led me to the right one."

"I don't understand, Queen!"

"We'd been taking it for granted that Bella Livingston's killer is also out to kill Amy," Ellery went on, studying Amy's graceful gestures. "But suppose he isn't? Suppose he's only trying to make it look that way? That's what I asked myself. And I saw that so long as we assumed Amy was also meant to be murdered, the motive continued to point to the three Livingstons, the only ones who benefit from her death. But if Amy *wasn't* really meant to be murdered, then the whole assumption of the Livingstons' guilt was out of joint and we had to re-examine the case from the beginning.

"That's just what I did, Mr. Wentworth. I went back to Bella's new will."

Amy was calmly stripping off her dress. There was a bathing suit underneath, and much sunburnished skin. Mr. Wentworth gaped.

"It struck me at once what a curious-*looking* will that is," Ellery said. "With all sorts of writing paper to choose from—I checked Bella Livingston's desk in her bedroom—her will is nevertheless written on onionskin paper. Why *onionskin,* a paper so thin it's translucent? Translucent . . . like tracing paper. Tracing paper! Was it possible old Bella had written her new will on ordinary paper, *but someone had traced over it and substituted the tracing for the original?"*

Ellery flicked his cigarette into the pond. "You see how one thought led to another, Mr. Wentworth. Why a *tracing* of a will? Obviously, to make a change. A simple change, for a complex one—as in forming new words—would have required the tracer to be an expert forger. What simple change? I recalled that the will gave, as the approximate value of Bella Livingston's principal estate, the figure $1,000,000. And it came to me in a flash: Suppose the genuine will had given the value of the estate as $4,000,000, or $7,000,000, or $9,000,000? How simple it would be, in a tracing, to leave out the wedge of the 4, the horizontal stroke of the 7, or the loop of the 9! Then 4, 7, or 9 becomes 1, and a multimillion-

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dollar estate magically becomes a $1,000,000 estate.

"But that led to an astonishing conclusion, Mr. Wentworth. Who could have made that tracing? Why, only the man who had possession of the new will from Saturday morning, when Bella Livingston signed it before witnesses in his office, until Tuesday afternoon, when he produced the tracing after the funeral and purported it to be the original. And who would benefit by such a change? Strangely enough, only the same man—who's been handling Bella Livingston's affairs for years and who's named administrator of her estate. You, Mr. Wentworth."

Herbert Wentworth squatted like a frightened toad on the landing.

"You're not your father's son, Wentworth," said Ellery. "Your father would have cut his hands off before he touched a penny of the moneys entrusted to him. But you couldn't resist the golden opportunity handed to you. You had the new will, its contents unknown. You had the stocks and the bonds and the records. And in old Bella's house were three live suspects if anything should happen to her. So you stole into her house at three a.m. last Sunday, crept into her bedroom, and smothered her in her sleep—knowing you had until Tuesday to make a tracing of her will and change the figure she had put down to a 1 . . . giving you the balance to pocket and all the time in the world—you thought—to cover your tracks."

"Only you didn't make it, Wentworth," said Chief Dakin in his sorrowing way. "I've had lawyers from the State's Attorney's office working on this behind your back since Thursday night. They've already uncovered enough to show that the estate's worth four million dollars easy. And of course we just took that onionskin will back from the Court of Probate and turned it over to experts. Why, Herb, you left a fingerprint *under* some of the tracing." Dakin shook his head. "And when we opened your safe deposit box by court order yesterday we even found the original of Bella's new will. Now why'd you save that, Herb? I guess maybe because it ain't so easy to change the honest habits of a lifetime."

The drops dripping from the lawyer's clothes began to scatter in their fall.

Amy turned suddenly to look at the pond.

"Finally," Ellery said, "those two attempts on Amy's life. I knew you'd killed Bella, Wentworth; but I was merely assuming you'd dosed Amy's fruit juice and fired the shot at her in order to cast further suspicion on the Livingstons. If my assumption was correct, your attempts on Amy were deliberate phonies. If I was right you didn't *want* her to die—in fact, you'd go

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far to preserve her life, because Amy murdered within days of Bella's murder would bring that traced will back under scrutiny.

"So," said Ellery, "I got Amy to stage a little drowning scene this morning to see what you would do. And you did it, Wentworth—you nearly drowned yourself in your anxiety to keep her alive. Amy, by the way, can swim like a fish."

"I think that's all, Herb," said Chief Dakin after a while, "except," he added, "for the unpleasant part."

They sat in silence while Herbert Wentworth stumbled off through the woods, followed by the comments of the birds and the sad clump of Dakin's shoes.

"Poor Mr. Wentworth," Amy said at last.

"Poor Mr. Queen," mourned Ellery. "What on earth am I going to say to those three back at the house, Amy? They've taken a pretty bad beating."

"Oh, I don't think they'll mind," murmured Amy, "after I've talked to them. You see, I've been thinking . . ."

"What, again?" said Ellery in some dismay.

"No, really. How could I possibly spend more than one-fourth of the income from four million dollars?" Amy threw her head back to the sun. "Isn't it a beautiful day?"

Ellery took her hand.

"Beautiful," he said.

'Q'

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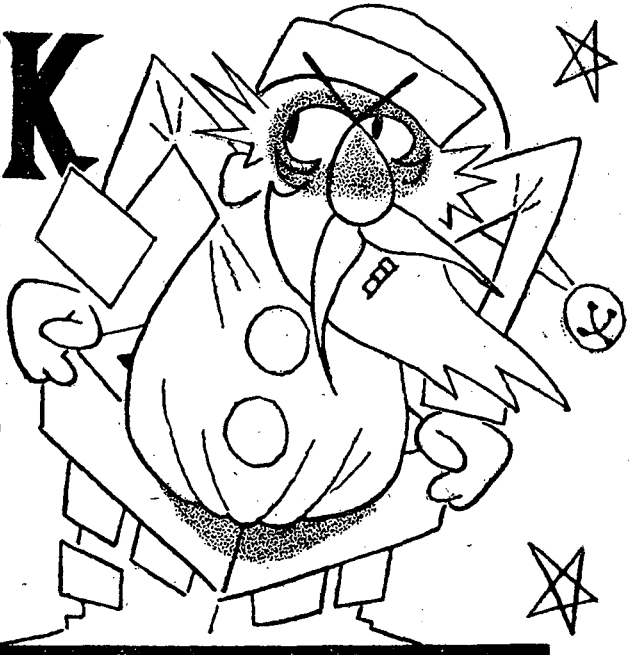

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